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THE  
JEALOUS WIFE.

BY  
MISS PARDOE,  
AUTHOR OF  
"THE LIFE OF MARIE DE MEDICIS,"  
&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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# THE JEALOUS WIFE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE FIRST QUARREL.

“AND I have still more news for you, Sydney,” said his wife on his return home ; and she informed him of the unexpected visit of her relatives, and their proposals to become sponsors to her boy ; and while speaking she narrowly watched the effect of her words ; “our little friend, Edith, is to be the wife of Hubert Trevanion.”

“By Jove ! he is a lucky fellow !” was the





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Elphinstone laughed.

"In her case, perhaps I am;" he said; "for it has been to me a very interesting study."

"And a profitable one, no doubt."

"I hope so; for the contemplation of excellence cannot fail to be profitable; and depend upon it, that the more insight you obtain into that girl's heart, the more you will love her."

"One love satisfies me."

"Traitor!" said Sydney playfully; "when not a day passes that you do not compel me to feel jealous of our boy."

"Jealous!" echoed Ida; "oh! Sydney, tell me the truth—are you, could you ever be jealous?"

"Not of you, dearest;" replied her husband in a voice of the deepest tenderness: "not of you—I should hate myself were I capable of such a heresy; but still I confess to the egotism of murmuring against all and everything which distracts your attention from my-

self. Come now, confess—have I not some reason to complain of that riotous urchin who has usurped all my rights? Does he not occupy almost every hour of your time?”

“But you have found other occupation, Sydney.”

“You compelled me to it. I love the boy dearly—of that you need no assurance—but, were it not that he has your eyes and your smile, there are moments when I could almost wish that we were once more all in all to each other.”

“And are we not so?” asked Ida hastily.

“Yes and no: in heart no doubt we are: but, I repeat it, that boy has sadly encroached upon my privileges.”

“Perhaps I have been to blame, Sydney; but still you will admit that while I have been engaged with our child, you have found, or created, other pursuits in which you have, to all appearance, at least, taken very considerable interest.”

"What could I do? You abandoned me to my own resources."

"Do not mistake me, love;" said Mrs. Elphinstone; "I am not speaking to blame you, I am only anxious to exonerate myself; and most certainly I should have been less independent in my own movements, had you not secured so charming a companion as Edith Malcolm."

"She is a sweet girl, that I am quite willing to admit;" conceded Sydney; "but still she is not my wife."

Ida bit her lip.

"Surely," she said;" that circumstance, at least, can be no drawback to your pleasure in her society."

"Certainly not; but you do not appear to understand me."

"Be under no apprehension of the sort;" replied Ida with a forced laugh; "I am not so obtuse as you imagine. I think that I understand you perfectly. But really, Sydney,

it has just occurred to me that, under existing circumstances, it might perhaps be as well if you were not for the future to engross quite so much of Edith's time and attention."

"What *can* you mean, Ida?"

"My meaning must be sufficiently obvious. As an engaged woman—"

"Nonsense! Is she not engaged to your own cousin?"

"So it would appear."

"Then it seems to me that 'existing circumstances' should rather tend to heighten than to decrease our intimacy."

"That may not, however, be the light in which Mr. Trevanion may regard it."

Elphinstone suddenly looked away from the glass before which he was somewhat fastidiously arranging his hair, and gazed steadfastly into the face of his wife:

"In that case," he said with a gravity unusual to him, "it must have been unplea-

sant to yourself, or so strange an idea could never have entered your mind."

"*My mind!*" echoed Ida, with a constrained attempt at playfulness; "Oh, that is quite a different affair; it is only *before* marriage that people are supposed to resent the intrusion of a third person between them; and I am now an old married woman, who must be swayed by facts rather than feelings."

Sydney was silent; there was something in the tone of his wife's voice which for the first time jarred upon his ear.

"Surely," he said at last; "you cannot imagine—"

"Imagine nothing;" interposed Mrs. Elphinstone; "I have not a particle of romance in my composition."

"If I supposed that you could for a moment think me capable—"

"My dear Sydney, you are really fighting against a shadow! You quite terrify me by

your dark looks. What have I said or done to anger you ?”

“ Nothing, Ida, nothing ; I am wounded, but not angry : I could not be angry with you ; but I confess—”

“ Confess nothing, it would appear that we been exchanging words and not ideas ; a mental gladiatorship by no means desirable.—What are your plans for the day ?”

“ I have formed none.”

“ Edith is anxious to go to the National Gallery ; there is still time enough before dinner ; will you accompany her ?”

“ No.”

“ No ! are you serious ?”

“ Perfectly so.”

“ And what can be your reason ?”

“ I shall remain at home with you.”

“ My poor Sydney, you will be *ennuyé à mort*.”

“ Ida ;” said her husband, as he seated himself beside her, and took her hand in his,



while large tears were swelling in his eyes. "There is something alike in your voice and manner which I endeavour in vain to comprehend. Since the hour in which you became my wife, the sole study of my life has been to secure your happiness. If I have failed, tell me at once the cause of that failure, that I may at least strive to repair it. Be frank ; be sincere ; I can support blame when I am conscious that it is merited ; but let me at least understand the ground on which I stand."

"Have I uttered one word of blame?"

"You have not ; but you have done worse ; you have implied it. Have I deserved that you should treat me with this cold and bitter sarcasm ? How am I to interpret either your manner or your words ? Tell me plainly and at once in what I have offended you."

"Why should you suppose that I am offended ?" asked Mrs. Elphinstone ; "are you conscious of having given me cause of offence ?"

“On my soul, I am not.”

“Then the question is a strange one.”

“Ida! Ida! you will drive me mad;” he exclaimed, starting from the sofa; I have not deserved this.”

“Will you explain your meaning, Sydney?” asked his wife calmly.

“I will—would that I were unable to do so, but I cannot deceive myself—oh, Ida, that you, whom I have until this hour regarded as the most perfect of your sex—that *you* should indeed be guilty of such a weakness. But no, no; I wrong you—it cannot be—you are too high-minded, too pure in heart, to wrong either that innocent girl or myself by so foul a suspicion; only tell me that it is I who ought to blush for even venturing to glance at such a thought—reproach me, upbraid me, Ida, for so vile a distrust of your generous nature—for so frightful a belief, transient as it was—only say that you forgive me, though I cannot promise to forgive myself.”

“Calm yourself, Sydney;” said Mrs. Elphinstone, to whom the very intensity of her feelings gave an unnatural composure which added to the emotion of her husband; “I have no reproach to utter—what I foresaw has come to pass; you placed too great a reliance on a mere transitory passion, and you are beginning to discover your error. I have long seen this—long felt it—but I was strong enough to suffer in silence; I am so still; I shall remain so until I feel that my suffering can avail me nothing, and that it has become my duty to assert myself.

“You have forced this avowal from me; or rather, perhaps, I have been led to make it from a sense of delicacy towards my cousin, who will probably be susceptible on the subject of his future wife.”

“And who would dare to malign that pure young girl who is as innocent as an angel?” asked Elphinstone passionately.

“Her purity and innocence may be con-

sidered questionable when it is known that she has alienated the affections of a husband from his wife," was the cold reply.

"Listen to me, Ida;" exclaimed Sydney with a vehemence that even startled his apparently impassive companion; "I could have borne all but this; *my* honour is at your mercy, trample on it if such is indeed your pleasure, but I will brook no slur on *hers*; she is the child of my mother's chosen friend, the playmate of my boyhood, the hope and pride of a widowed parent's heart: earth contains not a more blameless, a more guileless spirit. If you have decided on the ruin of our domestic peace, I must submit; but your insane suspicions must extend no further, touch not a hair of her head by calumny; but, if you have indeed ceased to respect your own dignity, at least respect her innocence."

"Mr. Elphinstone," said his wife indignantly; "you appear to forget that I am at your mercy."

“No, Ida, no ; I forget nothing ; and you may believe me when I declare that now you have learnt to look upon me as the base and unmanly ruffian that your words imply, I rejoice from my inmost heart that you have so opportunely secured partial and powerful friends, who are able to offer you a more fitting home than that which you accuse me of having dishonoured.”

“Sydney !” exclaimed his wife ; “you are cruel even to cowardice ; you do not even shrink from threatening me with a second desertion. Forgetting that for you I became an alien from my home, you presume upon my helplessness to insult me. Did I not tell you when you combatted my reason with your specious sophistries, that you would one day remember that you had sacrificed yourself to a woman older than yourself ? Did I not warn you against the folly of believing that you would not one day feel this, and visit the penalty of your mistake upon my weakness ? Do me justice in this at least.”

“Ida, do not urge me too far ; you have no right, you have no reason, to talk to me in such a strain as this.”

“Enough ! enough !” gasped out his wife ; “you justify yourself by casting the blame on me, and I must submit. Be it so ; there must be a victim—sacrifice *me*—as I before admitted, I am at your mercy. The world will be ready enough to exonerate you ; there will be little sympathy, and less pity for the woman of six-and-twenty who entrapped the affections of a boy.”

“This is too much !” exclaimed Elphinstone, as he started from his seat, and rapidly paced the room ; “all is indeed over between us—we must part. How I have loved you none have known ; none can ever know ; I would have clung to you through life and death. You were everything to me ; the very air I breathed was not less essential to my happiness ; but now——well, it is idle to repine ; I am ready to pay the penalty of my

mistake. You have withdrawn from me alike your confidence and your affection ; and for both our sakes, it is better that we should part."

Ida suddenly clasped her forehead with her spread hands, and fastened a gaze of agony upon her husband.

"Is it so?" she asked in a whisper which fell upon the ear with all the shrillness of a suppressed scream ; "is it really so ? And could you indeed part from me so willingly ? Sydney, Sydney, how have I deserved this ?"

For a moment the whole frame of Elphinstone quivered, and he resolutely averted his eyes ; but gradually the flush faded from his cheek, and the frown which had darkened his forehead passed away.

"No," he murmured, tremulously ; "no ; you are right ; it would be the rending asunder of body and soul ; and yet even that were better than we should live on under the same roof, the one suspected and despised, and the other——"

“What of the other, Sydney? What of the other?” passionately demanded his wife, springing from the sofa, and throwing herself upon his bosom; “Oh, Sydney, what of the other?”

“I cannot—and must not dwell upon the subject;” was the agitated reply; “I have fallen from such a height into an abyss so frightful, that I want moral courage to probe my wretchedness to its actual depth.”

“Yet you did love me, Sydney.”—

“Love you!” echoed her husband; “do you ask me if I loved you? look into your own heart, and read there if I have merited that such a question should be put to me! It is because I loved you so entirely, so devotedly, that I am at this moment incapable not only of deciding how I ought to act, but even of so acting, if my reason pointed out the proper and becoming course.”

“And do you not love me still?”

“Ida, you have made me very, very wretched.”



“And I? am I not also most miserable? Did I not for your sake abandon father, mother, home—and brave the comments of an unsparing world? And now you threaten to desert me—me, and my worse than orphaned boy— Oh, Sydney, Sydney, can you, indeed, do this?”

“Tell me, Ida, only tell me that this is a frightful dream;” said Elphinstone, as he stood encircled by her clinging arms; “I cannot, dare not, think that I have really lost my every hope of happiness. Tell me that all about me is a delusion, a cheat of my disordered fancy.”

“Nothing is real, my own Sydney, nothing but my repentance. Do you not see my tears? do you not feel the throbbings of my heart. Shall I kneel to you for pardon?”

“Hush, Ida, hush!” said Elphinstone, hoarse with emotion; “I can bear no more. Let us strive to forget all that has just past; let us remember only our days of happiness,

those days when there was trust and confidence between us ; let us think only of our child ; and for his sake endeavour to bear with each others faults, and to repair our own. I have erred — unconsciously, indeed, but still I have erred or the woman in whom I had centred all my earthly hopes would not have accused me—the faults shall be repaired. I will state frankly to Lady Malcolm, that the constant intercourse between her daughter and myself has been a source of uneasiness to my wife, and that I consequently feel it to be my duty——”

“Sydney ;” exclaimed Ida ; “do you wish to see me expire at your feet ? would you make me a mark for the scorn and ridicule of an irritated mother ? Oh, this is too—too much.”

“In what other way can I convince you of my willingness to fulfil my share of the compact I have suggested ?” demanded Elphinstone, with a dignity of manner which awed his

excited and exhausted wife, who was sinking beneath the violence of long-suppressed and unconquerable emotion; "only name your wishes, and they shall be obeyed."

"Pity me—pardon me,"—broke in a low murmur from the lips of the wretched and self-tortured wife."

"I do both; and now listen, Ida." But he spoke to ears which were no longer conscious of his voice—her over-taxed energies would endure no more—and she had fainted.

To raise her nerveless form, fold her frantically to his bosom, and implore her to forgive him, was the work of a moment to the unhappy Sydney; who, as he gazed upon her faultless face, now pale and cold as marble, and contemplated that "life in death" which is so fearful a counterfeit of actual dissolution, felt as though he were in very fact the murderer that he called himself.

Vainly did he press his fevered lips upon her cheek and brow, his caress remained with-

out response ; equally vain were his wild entreaties that she would look at him—speak to him. The closed eye and rigid mouth remained still—the very pulses of her heart had ceased to beat—and at length, fairly maddened by his fear and his remorse, the poor young man sank down beside her, and buried his face amid the folds of her dress, as still and motionless as the slight form against which he leant.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE RECONCILIATION.

AN hour passed away, yet Elphinstone neither spoke nor moved ; but unlike that of his wife, who lay in a state of utter unconsciousness, his period of inaction was far from being one of rest.

An agony of spirit too intense for physical demonstration crushed him to the very earth. His bodily energies were dormant, but his mental powers were painfully, bitterly active.

Like one in a hideous dream, he looked back upon the illusions of the past only to be scourged once more into suffering by the reali-

ties of the present ; and what did that present now offer to his contemplation ?

In the severity of his great and absorbing happiness, in the joy of loving, and feeling that he was beloved, he had wilfully put from him all the uncertainties of the future ; like the unwary traveller who, engrossed by the glorious landscape around him, forgets the sure progress of time, and finds himself suddenly benighted without refuge or shelter, he had sauntered on in the pleasant path which spread itself before him, without taking one precaution against the hour when it might become tangled and hard to tread ; and thus he found himself unable to cope with the difficulties by which he was surrounded.

Had he been less devoted to his wife, all would have been comparatively easy, as, in the event of a reconciliation, he might have consoled himself under the miserable conviction of her weakness by once more courting the smiles of a world ever ready to bestow

them upon the young and gifted who can bring appropriate incense to its shrine; or even—were this reconciliation impossible, it would still have been in his power to commence a new career, trammelled indeed by bitter memories, but still open to a sanguine and energetic nature. Now, however, it was far otherwise, for, young as he was, Sydney Elphinstone had staked his all of happiness on his love for Ida, and he loved her still, even in this hour of agony when he could not conceal from himself that she had forfeited a portion of his respect. He probed his heart unshrinkingly, but no accusing voice came from its depths—not a thought, not a wish, had wandered from her; and the blow fell with corresponding weight.

What was to be the end? what hope, what trust, could he ever again rest upon her affection after she had thus so cruelly misjudged him? He felt that henceforward he should be perpetually standing on the brink of a pre-

cipice down which he might be hurled at any moment, without having himself made one onward step. It was a harrowing reflection; he was as yet only on the threshold of manhood; he had barely entered his twenty-second year; and already he had experienced one of the most bitter trials of life.

Hot tears flooded his heart, and stagnated there—his burning eyeballs were dry. He had become an object of suspicion to the woman whom he would himself have trusted even to the death. True, she had evidently repented her ungenerous want of confidence, while it was equally certain that she still loved him—there was no mistaking the cry of anguish with which she had thrown herself upon his bosom; but what, to such a nature as his, was love without faith? Nothing; less than nothing: a perpetual mockery which must wear away not only her existence, but his own also.

There could be no return of the halcyon



days, when heart met heart without misgiving; henceforward, every word and action must be weighed; and a never-ceasing restraint, like a mortal coat of mail, never to be put off, must exist between them.

Not once, during his long and painful vigil, had it occurred to Elphinstone to summon assistance. The dead silence which had succeeded to the storm of passion appeared so natural a consequence of the previous excitement, that he continued helplessly engrossed by his own miserable thoughts, until a deep sigh from Ida recalled him to a sense of her situation. Slowly, then, and with a sigh whose intensity formed a fitting echo to her own, he rose from his knees, and pillowing her head upon his shoulder, deluged her pale face with an essence which he found upon her table.

His hand shook, and his lip quivered as he looked upon her, so lovely and so helpless in her unconsciousness; and when, as he almost

frantically pressed a kiss upon her forehead, she at length opened her eyes with a wild and inquiring expression, a convulsive sob which he could not repress, replied to the appeal.

“Ha!” murmured Ida, as she swept her hand across her brow; “now I remember all—all—but you will not abandon me, Sydney? you will not make our child motherless?”

“Be calm, Ida, be calm;” he answered in a voice so changed that it sounded strange even to his own ears; “have we not already decided that we must endeavour to forget the past? Let us fulfil the pledge. I have lived too long for myself; for the past I will substitute the future. There are duties hitherto neglected which henceforth shall be performed: indulgences which henceforth shall be abandoned; you shall have no further cause of complaint against me.”

“Sydney, what mean you?”

“I will no longer be a mere man of pleasure, forgetting all my home-happiness, the

responsibilities which have devolved upon me. I will at last be strong and earnest ; I have work before me—it shall be accomplished ; hitherto, in the egotism of a false and unworthy pride, I have shrunk from suing for the help of others to aid me on my onward path ; now I will shrink no longer ; but boldly put from me the weak shame of soliciting what I cannot command. My day of sloth is at an end, and that of labour shall commence in earnest. When you know that I am toiling for you and for our boy, you will learn to trust me.”

“ Oh, speak less coldly—I cannot bear it.”

“ Poor girl !” said Elphinstone ; “ we must both strive to bear our burthen. I am not cold, but I have aged years within the last two hours, and I must seek to profit by the experience so dearly bought. Rouse yourself, Ida ; the realities of life have come upon us—suddenly and harshly, it is true—but they have come, and we must face them bravely. We

have dreamt a glorious dream, but let us not embitter the awakening by useless repinings for the past."

"And is this all? Have you, indeed, cast me from your heart for ever?"

"No, Ida, no ; while it beats it must beat for you. But we can no longer deceive ourselves ; a gulf has yawned between us in which the dearest of our mutual illusions have gone down—your faith in me—my trust in your confiding affection. It is a sad truth, but we cannot conceal it from ourselves ; let us, therefore, rather mourn over it together : it will be another bond of sympathy between us."

"Sydney, my heart is breaking!" gasped his wife.

"Rest it upon mine," was the reply, as he drew her closer to him, and folded her in his arms. "We can still love each other, Ida—let that be our consolation."

"But if I solemnly vow never again to doubt you——"

“ Strive, for both our sakes, to place what trust in me you can, but make no vow—it would be at once idle and impotent.”

Mrs. Elphinstone sank back upon the sofa convulsed with agony. She no longer recognised her husband: the idolising lover had been transformed, as if by some occult magic, into the stern and moralising mentor: his heart was still hers, but his reason had condemned her.

All around her was a blank waste—she felt as if she could have shrieked out in her anguish, while she had not even power to stay the large cold tears which were chasing each other down her cheeks.

Sydney, meanwhile, sat with his head buried in his hands—he was still dizzy from the effects of his sudden wretchedness; and thus they both remained for a time silent and motionless.

Suddenly Ida arose from her recumbent position, and sprang to the bell.

“Bring me my child ;” she said to the servant who obeyed the summons ; and in an instant he was in her arms.

“Sydney,” she murmured, as she sank on her knees before him, and held towards him the unconscious infant, laughing, and struggling to reach its father ; “pardon me, and trust me for his sake.”

Elphinstone looked up ; a wild burst of grief shook him as with an ague fit ; he strove to speak, but his words were inaudible ; yet Ida was satisfied ; the infant was clinging to his bosom ; her own head rested upon his knee ; and she felt his hot tears rain down upon her hair. He did not attempt to raise her from the ground ; he was evidently unconscious of the lowly posture in which she had sued for forgiveness ; his moral strength was spent ; that last agonizing cry came from the mother of his child, and his heart had melted within him.

How could he doubt her at that moment,

when the soft little hand of his firstborn was pressed against his cheek? He did not; he was incapable of following up the train of thought by which he had just been oppressed; his sense of wrong had spent itself; he could only yearn for peace, and rest.

“My own best love!” he at length faltered out; “come to my heart, Ida; let me hold you there together.”

With a wild gasp his wife flung herself upon his neck; and both believed as they clung together in that close embrace that they were once more happy beyond the reach of fate. Alas! that those clinging arms should ever relax—that the blessed oblivion of that moment should ever yield to the memories of the past, and the threatenings of the future! The eastern traveller, after thirsting and panting in the desert, indulges in the same fallacy, as he reaches the green oasis, casts himself down under the sheltering trees, and laves his parched throat with the sparkling water: he

forgets the weary waste of sand behind him ; he casts no anxious glance over the arid wilderness before him ; the present is for the moment all in all ; but still the fact remains unchanged, that on the track which he had passed he has left time, and strength, and energy ; and on that which he has still to pursue, the same, and perhaps greater perils, await him.

Yet both body and mind may well seek rest in these halting-places of life and travel, for without them, few could survive the journey.

And there were peace and love once more in that modest cottage ; fond endearments, and gentle words, and looks more eloquent than words ; the leafy boughs still afforded their grateful shade ; the limpid water still touched their lips refreshingly, the grass was green beneath their feet, the heavens blue above their heads——and the desert lay afar off in the distance.



## CHAPTER III.

## THE TEMPTER.

ON the following morning, true to the resolve which he had made to himself, Elphinstone proceeded early to the Temple ; where, in default of any more active professional occupation, he passed several hours in close and earnest study, and resolutely flung from him the languor consequent upon the excitement which he had undergone on the previous day.

Occasionally, sad thoughts, and even forebodings, forced themselves upon him, but suffering had made him strong, and he would

not yield to that yearning for mental repose which would have rendered him unable to pursue his task.

With Ida, however, it was far otherwise. Her husband had for months past been constantly at home, and she had become so habituated to his presence, that, had she even been free from every other cause of suffering, her solitude would of itself have been irksome to her. As it was, therefore, it became after a time, almost unendurable.

She had whiled away the early hours of the morning with her infant, but at length he slept; and she had no resource save her own thoughts, when, after having seated herself at the instrument, and discovered that her irritated nerves could not support the sound of music; turned to her easel, and found that her unsteady fingers failed in their accustomed skill; and thrown aside a book over which her eyes wandered mechanically, without taking in its sense; she at last threw herself hopelessly into

a chair, and abandoned all further attempt at occupation.

For awhile she could not collect her ideas ; all seemed vague and dream-like : her husband's sudden assumption of authority ; her own submission ; all appeared unnatural and impossible ; but gradually the mental mist was swept away, and she recalled with a distinctness that made her pulses throb, and her brow burn with emotion, every look and word which had passed between them.

Silently she sat, with clasped hands so tightly clenched together, that the tips of her fingers were bloodless from the pressure. The first question that she had put to her own heart had been—How could I doubt him ? How had he deserved that I should so wrong his frank and noble nature ? And, under this first impulse, bitterly did she condemn herself ; but as time wore on, the busy fiend for whom she had so long made a home within her bosom, began once more to struggle into

life ; her jealousy had been crushed by fear, not annihilated by conviction.

She remembered that Sydney had upbraided her for a suspicion which he had denounced as impure and unwomanly, and that he had even volunteered to forego the society of Lady Malcolm and her daughter ; but she also recalled the fact to mind that, while blaming her, he had been enthusiastic in his praise of Edith ; and that he had not once striven to exculpate himself : that he had been indignant, but not explanatory ; loud in deprecation of her own conduct, but silent with regard to his own personal feelings.

Was this fair ? was this manly ? were her next mental queries ; and the inward demon murmured — no — you were borne down by words ; you were overwhelmed but not convinced ; and yet you were weak enough to yield to mere idle declamation — the declamation of a boy, proud in his sense of power, and wielding his pigmy bow with as much import-

ance as though he were, like Sagittarius, about to bring down a constellation at every shot, when, in point of fact, he was only firing into the void. Were you required to make your own heart, which he had already wounded, a target for his weapon? It would have been time enough to have played the submissive wife when he had justified himself in your eyes—but what proof had you?—what proof did he offer to you that you had wronged him? None—he reproached and threatened, while you wept and sued; and what have you gained? Conviction? Peace of mind?—And with a shuddering sigh, Ida answered—“neither—I am *not* convinced—I am *not* at peace.”

And still her child slept on!

“Delightful!” exclaimed a cheerful voice, as the drawing-room door opened, and the full-plumed bonnet and searching eyes of Mrs. Darnell appeared, glancing and fluttering their way towards Ida: “Mrs. Elphinstone not only

at home, but also alone ! How pleased I am that I made my first visit here. The Doctor told me that I should weary you with my company if I called too often ; but men understand these matters so badly, that I was determined to persist. Only say that you are glad to see me,"

"I am *very* glad to see you ;" said her hostess extending her hand, and, by a violent effort, arousing herself from her abstraction ; "and duly appreciate your kindness in wasting your time upon a recluse, when you must have so many more agreeable engagements."

"Recluse, indeed, my dear young lady ; but why should it be so ? with your beauty and your talents, you could always command society."

"I care little now for what is called the world ;" was the reply ; "I have tried it, and found it alike hollow and heartless."

"We have all done that in our turn ;" said the visitor, with as much sententiousness as

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she could contrive to throw into her tone and manner; "but we can at least pay it back in its own currency. The world amuses me; it has amused me all my life; and I am contented to make use of it in its own way."

"You are a practical philosopher," said Ida with a smile.

"Now, that is so like one of the Doctor's remarks!" exclaimed the voluble little lady, settling herself upon the chair. "He is always telling me that I am this, that, or the other, of which I have not the most remote idea myself."

"In your modesty;" said Ida, with a gleam of her old humour; "you are then, probably, like Molière's gentleman, who had talked prose all his life without being aware of it."

"Very likely; at all events, I know that it is very pleasant to talk with you—particularly when you are alone—for I have taken an immense fancy to you, and am glad to have you for once all to myself."

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"I cannot but feel greatly flattered;" replied her hostess; "and only regret that I shall prove a sorry companion to-day, as I am suffering severely from nervous headache."

"A nasty complaint;" said Mrs. Darnell; "a very nasty complaint. Do let me be professional, and recommend camphor julep; or, better still, fresh air and exercise. You are too much in the house, Mrs. Elphinstone."

"Perhaps I am; but I am ashamed to confess that I have not courage to walk alone."

"Of course not; it would be highly incorrect for you to do so; but there is your husband, who must only be too delighted to show himself with a beautiful woman upon his arm. All men like it; it flatters their vanity."

"Mr. Elphinstone is engaged at the Temple."

"Not always: I have frequently seen him walking with Miss Malcolm."

Ida's cheek flushed slightly, but she controlled herself. "He was an idle man at that



time ;" she said quietly ; " but now he is about to devote himself to his profession."

" All very proper, no doubt ; I have not a word to say on the subject ; it is only a pity you did not profit by his period of idleness to lay in a stock of health."

" I was a nurse all that time, and could not leave my boy."

" My dear Mrs. Elphinstone ;" said the little woman demurely ; " let me hope that you will not fall into the same error as many young mothers, and by devoting yourself too much to your infant, allow your husband to perceive that he can do without you : it is a lesson that men soon learn, and never forget. At this very moment I could really find it in my heart to be seriously angry with you, for not going at least a short distance to meet Mr. Elphinstone, instead of allowing Miss Malcolm to do so."

" What *can* you mean, my dear Mrs. Darnell ?"

"Mean!" echoed the lady; "what can I mean, but that I passed them on the road as I came here; and that I consider that I am only doing my duty by proving to you that you should be more cautious."

"I am sure you are very kind"—gasped Ida.

"I am sure that I wish to be so;" was the ready reply; "and you young creatures all require the assistance of older and wiser heads than your own. 'Experience makes fools wise,' says the proverb; and you must have time before you can gain experience."

"It appears to me, nevertheless, that some experience is forced upon us very rapidly."

"No doubt of it, but is it worth much? Does it make you happier or better?"

"Neither, I fear."

"Of course not; that is quite a different sort of thing. The experience that I mean——"

Mrs. Darnell paused; if she really did know what she meant, she was certainly unable to

express it ; and after an instant's silence she resumed abruptly :

“ Now, as an example of what I want you to understand—suppose, for instance, you had occasionally waived your duties as a mother to fulfil those of a wife, do you not see at once that you would have been more necessary to your husband, and not have thrown him so constantly into the society of that pretty girl, Miss Malcolm ? Very dangerous, very dangerous indeed, my dear lady ; for men will be men ; and although you are so much handsomer than your young friend, you ought to remember that she is not his wife, and that there is always a charm in novelty.”

“ She is not *my* friend ;” said Ida, bitterly ; “ Lady Malcolm and Mr. Elphinstone’s mother were greatly attached ; and as a natural consequence——”

“ Yes, yes ; I perfectly comprehend——” said the visitor, with a sagacious nod ; “ the old family affection has created a sort of cousin-

ship, which is all very well when not carried too far ; but really I have seen so much trouble brought about by sentimental attachments of that kind, that I feel it more than ever my duty to warn you to be upon your guard. Mr. Elphinstone is a charming young man, but still he is *very* young, and cannot be expected to calculate the consequences of any little indiscretion into which he may be led by a warm heart and high spirits. I have, as I said before, taken a great fancy to you, and therefore I venture to be frank ; they say, you know, that ‘lookers on see most of the game.’ ”

“And what have you seen ?” asked Ida, struggling to retain her composure.

“Little as yet, very little, I confess ;” was the unsatisfactory reply ; “but then you must remember that I have only recently made your acquaintance.”

“But something you must have seen ;” persevered Mrs. Elphinstone ; “or you would not

have considered it necessary to urge me to greater prudence."

"These affairs require delicate handling;" said Mrs. Darnell, with a complacency which betrayed her perfect confidence in her own skill and tact; "a look or a word may mean so much or so little; and as my only aim is to tranquillise your mind, and to impress upon you your responsibilities as a wife, I cannot of course wish to make you see with my eyes, or understand with my understanding. All that I shall venture to say therefore, is this—do not encourage the intimacy between your husband and Miss Malcolm too far."

How, had her visitor exhibited an equal amount of low breeding and want of charity upon any other subject, would the high-minded Ida have loathed and despised her. How soon would she have silenced the busy tongue which sported so glibly with the holiest and most sacred feelings of others. How indignantly would she have rejected the com-

panionship of a vulgar gossip, whose prying eyes saw deep into the darkest corners of a quiet home, and peopled the void with phantoms!

Now, however, it was far otherwise; and Mrs. Darnell was not more convinced of the kindness and sagacity of her own proceedings than was her unhappy listener.

“You may be right;” she said, after a moment’s silence; “it may have been imprudent on my part to permit so close an intimacy between the two families, but it is only just to Mr. Elphinstone to tell you, that he voluntarily offered to put an end to it, should such be my wish.”

“Poor thing!” almost whispered her companion, as an expression of very sincere regret settled upon her usually joyous face; “Has it already come to that? I am sorry to hear it—very sorry—for that was precisely what I was anxious to prevent. I did hope to open your eyes before your husband could

suspect that he had given you one uneasy thought. All might have been so easily arranged in some way or other; it is a sad disappointment to me to find that the subject has been broached between you."

"You cannot regret it more than I do;" said Ida, gloomily; "I am sorry to have been so rash, but in an unguarded moment——"

"I can quite understand you; quite; but it is to be deplored that you were so far excited as to lose your self-command; for I know well by experience how these things end: let the wife be as perfect as she may, she must give way at last, so that, by attempting to protect and justify herself she only loses ground."

"Which she may perhaps never regain," murmured Mrs. Elphinstone, rather speaking to herself than addressing her companion.

"A very rational remark, my dear young lady;" said Mrs. Darnell approvingly; "and one which gives me a great respect for your

understanding; my late grandmother, who was a very superior woman, never took leave of a bride without saying to her : ‘You will be the idol of a month, but only a wife for the rest of your days; remember this; and, above all else, beware of the first quarrel—quarrel as much as you please afterwards, but beware of the first time, for rest assured, that although both may forgive neither will forget.’ She gave the same warning to scores of young women in her time; and I am really very, very sorry that I was not able to do the same kind office for you before it was too late.”

Ida made no reply; a weight had fallen upon her heart, and rested there like an incubus.

“However;” resumed the pertinacious visitor who had not penetration to discover that she had stretched her listener upon a moral rack which strained and tore every fibre of her spirit; “we will hope better things for you. Mr. Elphinstone is, as I before remarked, so



very young, and you are so very beautiful, that no doubt all will come right in time. Only, I entreat of you, take my advice; profit by his offer, and get rid of that very dangerous young lady.

“I have had an unpleasant task to perform, but the extraordinary interest which I feel for you rendered it a duty, according to my ideas of Christian charity and sisterly love. It would have been better certainly if Lady Malcolm had spared me so ungracious an office, as she most decidedly would have done had she displayed proper prudence; but I care little for my own feelings when I can relieve those of others.

“Look upon me, therefore, my dear Mrs. Elphinstone, as a warm and sincere friend, confide in me, and make use of me without ceremony or scruple, whenever I can be of service to you; for, as the Doctor truly says, I am never so happy as when I am mixed up with the troubles and trials of others. And

now, that I flatter myself I have comforted and soothed you, I will leave you to reflect upon our conversation. I need not say that I will soon see you again."

There was a flutter of gauze and feathers, a rustling of silk and velvet, a clasping of hands, an exchange of courteous words, and Mrs. Darnell disappeared. She paused for a moment in the hall to desire the maid, who attended her to the door, to be very, very careful of her poor mistress; and then the sound of her carriage-wheels died away in the distance; and still Ida stood erect and rigid on the spot where they had parted.

## CHAPTER IV.

## A STORM CLOUD.

DESPITE the fond embrace with which he had parted from his wife, Elphinstone could not conceal from himself, as he at length closed his books and left the Temple, that his home had ceased to be to him the haven of peace and love which it had once been.

All his most cherished associations had suddenly been shivered about him, and it was in vain that he strove to restore the fragments into a perfect whole: the shock was still too recent: the blow had been at once too heavy and too abrupt.

His sense of delicacy revolted at the recollection that Ida, who had even until the previous day been to him an object of worship, should suddenly have become a suppliant for pity and for pardon ; and that the confidence which he had placed in her affection should have been so cruelly requited ; his love for her continued unimpaired, but with it came a new and unwelcome feeling, that robbed it of half its charm.

Unconsciously his step grew languid, and he lingered on his way as he had never hitherto done after an absence of so many hours from his beautiful and gifted wife. What security had he that, even in that comparatively short space of time, she might not have encouraged new doubts, as wild and baseless as those which had already caused him so much misery ?

The Malcolms, too—how could he ever again meet them as he had hitherto done, conscious that every look and word must be

weighed and measured, and even then, perhaps, adduced as evidence against him ?

Poor Sydney, with his impulsive temperament and frank-heartedness, he keenly felt how difficult a task lay before him ; and, had he not been restrained by his promise to Ida, he would at once have confided to Lady Malcolm the embarrassing nature of his position, and left it to her more matured judgment to discover some mode of escape for both parties ; but Ida had shrunk from exposing her weakness to the mother of Edith, and he resolved to respect her dignity with as much jealousy as herself. Thus he had no resource save in his own moral courage, and bitter was the reflection that it should be first called into action to secure the tranquility of his own hearth.

Such were the musings of the young husband as he slowly proceeded on his homeward path, a path which, for the first time, he felt to be irksome ; nor could he conceal from himself, that it was actually a relief to him

when he encountered Lady Malcolm and her daughter, who were taking their accustomed walk, and to whom he felt compelled to offer his protection. The meeting, even trammelled as it was by a consciousness of the annoyance which Ida would feel could she be aware of the accident, was of service to him, as it served to direct his thoughts from his own trials, and to give them another direction.

Soothed by the calm good sense of his mother's friend, and enlivened by the gentle gaiety of her daughter, the moments passed swiftly and pleasantly; nor was it until he parted with the ladies at their own gate, that he was startled by the recollection that there no longer remained the time necessary for the walk which he had proposed to his wife as he left her, and for which she had promised to prepare herself against his return. Never before had he failed in any appointment involving her gratification, and at what a moment and in what a manner had he done so now! He actually trembled with

eagerness as he reached his own door, and anticipated the merited reproach with which she would probably receive him on his return.

Herein, however, he instantly discovered that he had deceived himself. As he entered the room, Mrs. Elphinstone was seated at the piano, from which she instantly rose with a smile to greet him.

“Will you forgive me, my love,” he asked; “for not having fulfilled my promise to return at an earlier hour than this? I am really quite distressed to be so late, but I have been detained.”

“Are you late?” asked Ida in her turn, affecting to consult the little French timepiece; “oh, no; we shall not dine for an hour yet, so that you have more time than you will require for your toilette.”

“But the walk upon which we had decided?”

“Ah, true;” she replied in the same accent of calm indifference in which she had first

spoken ; “ I remember now, that we did talk of a country ramble ; but, as you see, I had forgotten it, and had consequently made no preparation.”

Sydney was deeply hurt, and his countenance betrayed it ; but Mrs. Elphinstone was carefully collecting her music, and did not, or would not, seem to remark his annoyance.

“ Your forgetfulness cannot, however, exonerate me—” he commenced, struggling to assume as much composure as herself.

“ Oh, not a word more, my dear Sydney,” she interposed ; “ upon so unimportant a subject. I feel convinced that you were more usefully occupied ; and although I cannot boast of having passed my time as profitably as yourself, I have at least spent it very pleasantly.”

“ Are you, then, becoming so much enamoured of solitude, Ida ?”

“ By no means ;” was the quick rejoinder ; “ nor have I been solitary ; on the contrary,



Mrs. Darnell paid me a very long, and a very kind visit, for which I feel greatly indebted to her."

"Mrs. Darnell!" echoed Elphinstone emphatically. "It is impossible that you could derive any pleasure from the society of that trifling, mindless woman."

"You are quite in error, I assure you, Sydney, I have a decided *engouement* for Mrs. Darnell; and, more than that, I have also a great respect for her. She is so frank and warm-hearted, and, moreover, possessed of such admirable judgment, that I consider her friendship to be a valuable acquisition to one so inexperienced in the duties and privileges of a wife as myself."

"Ida! I had no idea that you could be so sarcastic."

"I intend no sarcasm. I have simply expressed my conviction of her character;" said his wife firmly; "and surely you must be happy to find that such a friend is willing to

enliven the hours rendered dreary by your absence."

"I should, indeed, be so;" rejoined Elphinstone; "could I enter into your feelings towards her; but the expression of such an opinion from *you* has, I confess, astonished me not a little."

"You perhaps think her too old to be agreeable," remarked Ida drily.

"Too old?" echoed Sydney. "You do me injustice. It depends on women themselves to be agreeable at any age.\* They have it in their power to be charming at every season, like the roses of the Philippine Islands, which are white at sunrise, pink at noon, and crimson at twilight; changeful it may be, but charming in every change."

"Who is sarcastic now?" asked Mrs. Elphinstone.

"Certainly not I;" laughed her husband; "and I think you must at least be compelled to admit that I have treated your new friend very poetically."

“ But you dislike her ?”

“ I confess that I do not admire her general deportment, and that I have rather a mean opinion of her understanding.”

“ You do her injustice ;” said Ida with a flashing eye ; “ she is a shrewd and clear-sighted woman, who only requires to be known in order to be appreciated.”

“ Now, how on earth, my dear girl ;” asked Sydney ; “ have you been able to make so extraordinary a discovery ? what can Mrs. Darnell have said or done to establish her fussy little self so firmly in your affections ?”

“ She has taken a sincere interest in me, and is anxious to contribute to my happiness.”

“ She is too kind :” replied Elphinstone in a grieved accent : “ but I trust that your happiness does not depend on her very supererogatory aid and support. You already possessed a friend equally anxious to render you every service in her power, and one who

would, I should have thought, have been infinitely more congenial to so refined a nature as your own, in Lady Malcolm."

. "Comparisons are invidious, my dear Sydney."

"Neither do I seek to institute a comparison between two women who are the antipodes of each other;" was the impatient rejoinder; "and you must forgive me if I frankly confess at once ~~that~~ to me the vulgar-minded wife of Dr. Darnell is positively insufferable."

"What can you have to fear from my friendship with the poor lady, who has so unconsciously inspired your dislike?"

"Fear! nothing assuredly for myself; but I feel disappointed that you should find pleasure in the society of a woman to whom I am satisfied that you would not have accorded a second glance before you became my wife."

"Perhaps not;" said Ida, with an ambiguous smile; "for, at that period, although

I lived in what is emphatically called 'the world,' I had never looked below its surface, and was consequently only one of the bubbles that floated down the tide, without comprehending what lay beneath; now, however, when I have to struggle against the current, I must learn to turn my gaze from the sunshine that gleams above, to the impediments which may possibly impede my progress—the rocks and shoals that are hidden in the depths of the stream."

"And has such a struggle really commenced for you, Ida?"

"Certainly, my dear Sydney; Am I not a wife and a mother? Are not our prospects uncertain? Our resources rapidly diminishing?"

"True;" said Elphinstone, gloomily; "true; your trials have indeed commenced; and if you conceive that they can be lessened by other sympathy than my own, you have every right to try the experiment."

Ida made no reply, but after having with

great apparent care smoothed the dark bands of hair which fell low upon her cheeks, before the mirror, she turned towards the book-case, and with the same affectation of fastidiousness selected a volume, with which she established herself upon the sofa, apparently forgetful of her husband's presence.

Elphinstone was bewildered, and as he paced slowly to and fro, he asked himself in vain what could be the meaning of his wife's extraordinary manner. Suddenly he stopped immediately in front of her, and gazed inquiringly into her face, but she read on calmly, with a smile playing about her lips, as though pleasantly engrossed by the book in which she was occupied.

At this moment the servant announced dinner.

"Already!" exclaimed Sydney; "and I have not even changed my dress. Will you excuse me for five minutes, Ida?"

"For any time you please; there is no

hurry in the world ;" replied his wife, without raising her eyes from the volume.

After another long look, which remained unnoticed like the last, Elphinstone, hurriedly left the room. As he did so, the book fell from his wife's hand to the floor, her eyes were strained in the direction where he had disappeared, and her trembling lips became livid. It was evident that she struggled fiercely to control the violence of the emotion which shook her whole frame to agony ; but she did control it ; not a tear moistened the quivering eyelids, not a sigh escaped the overcharged breast ; all was still, strong endurance ; the shaft hurled by the idle hand of Mrs. Darnell, had struck home, and the iron which rankled in the wound was crushed back as resolutely as the Spartan boy crushed back the living death that he carried in his bosom.

Already ! while the kiss of reconciliation was yet warm upon her lips—while the words of promise and of hope were still sounding in

her ears.——Already had Sydney again sought the society of the woman whom she feared and hated ; and forgotten his pledge to her. A low bitter laugh escaped her once, and once only ; nor did she stir a limb until aroused by the hasty step of her husband as he crossed the hall. Then she stooped, picked up the volume that lay at her feet, and, resuming the attitude in which he had left her, was once more, to all appearance, absorbed as before.

“Are you ready, Ida?” asked Elphinstone, as he paused at the door.

“Quite ;” she replied rising with alacrity and moving towards him.

The young man’s heart throbbed painfully. Could he have mistaken her? Had the book which she had persisted so pertinaciously in reading, really so much interested her that it had caused her to overlook his want of punctuality, and even rendered her for the moment independent of his society? It must be so ; and he had been doing battle with a shadow.



Strong in this conviction, she had no sooner reached his side than he took her hand, but it was instantly withdrawn.

"What can this mean?" he asked; "have I again offended you, Ida?"

"Oh, no;" was the reply, as by a violent effort she recovered her self-possession; "why should you suppose so?"

"Because you would not suffer me to take your hand."

"It is unnecessary;" she said quietly; "the distance is not great."

"True;" acquiesced Elphinstone as he followed her to the dining-room, thankful that the presence of the servant must for a time at least avert the storm which he saw was once more gathering around him.

The dinner passed almost in silence, and as the wondering attendant quietly performed her duties, Sydney felt the very air oppressive, so heavily did the singular demeanour of his wife weigh upon his spirit; nor was it until they

were again alone that he could rally sufficiently to make any attempt at conversation ; while even then the calm pale face of Ida actually awed him.

“ You appear to have been singularly interested in your book to-day,” he said at length. “ May I inquire what it was ? ”

“ I really do not recollect : ” was the reply ; “ it lies yonder ; perhaps you may like to read it.”

“ Not at present, I would rather converse with you.”

“ I shall be but a poor companion. My head aches horribly.”

“ I feared as much ; ” said Elphinstone eagerly, endeavouring to delude himself into the belief that he had now found the true solution of the enigma ; “ I felt sure that something was wrong. You are very pale, love ; shall I send for Dr. Darnell ? ”

“ Oh no, no ; ” exclaimed Mr. Elphinstone ; “ I will apply a better remedy,” and laying

her hand on the bell, she desired the servant by whom it was answered, to beg Lady Malcolm and her daughter to do her the favour to take their coffee with herself and Mr. Elphinstone.

“My dear Ida;” said her husband, as the attendant withdrew; “would not a perfectly quiet evening have been more beneficial in your present state than even the society of your friends?”

“Perhaps so, as regards myself;” was the cold reply; “but I am not selfish enough to sacrifice your gratification to my own—and it will, I should imagine, be pleasant to both Miss Malcolm and yourself to talk over your morning’s walk. They will no doubt be here in a few minutes, and meanwhile I will go and ascertain if Hubert is asleep.”

As she ceased speaking, she rose and left the room, while her husband, who instantly comprehended the whole extent of the new diffi-

culty in which he had so innocently involved himself, remained motionless with surprise and mortification.

## CHAPTER V.

## ESTRANGEMENT.

FROM the evening recorded in the last chapter no allusion was ever again made by Mrs. Elphinstone to her husband's implied admiration of Miss Malcolm, but he too well comprehended the nature of his wife to imagine for an instant that she any longer placed the slightest confidence in his affection ; and while he could have taken her to his heart, and wept over her pale cheek, and the rapid attenuation of her still graceful, but now fearfully fragile form, and poured forth all the agony of his soul at her mistrust ; he shrank from the slightest

demonstration, lest the appeal which he would fain have made to her reason should only lead to a renewal of the bitter scenes through which they had already passed.

And thus they lived on : Sydney smothering his better feelings, and sacrificing his innate sense of dignity, to that morbid love of ease which formed so prominent a feature in his generous but weak nature ; and Ida gnawing away her own heart in silence, conscious that when the moment of conviction came, the lava-flood of her indignation must carry ruin with it.

Elphinstone chafed under an injustice as baseless as it was unworthy ; while his wife, misled by her own wretched suspicions, and confirmed in her error by the inane consolation and advice of a mindless and ill-judging acquaintance, never for an instant suffered herself to doubt that she had become the victim of his inconstancy.

Thus, in order to escape from a thralldom

which was hateful to him, the young husband, who at the commencement of his married life had looked upon his chambers in the Temple as exile, because they involved an occasional and brief separation from the object of his idolatry, soon learned to feel that his most genial home was there—there, where no cold but ever-watchful eye noted his every movement; where no quick but apparently careless ear drank in his every word; and where no diseased and distorted imagination converted even his most inconsequent actions into matters of moment, pregnant with inquiry and meaning.

The ready smile and unquestioning docility of his wife wounded him to the quick, for they were no longer the assurances of affection and devotedness; the smile was hollow, and the docility overacted and unnatural; there was no longer any communion of spirit between them; Ida was a mere human automaton, answering to every spring at his pleasure, but originating no movement of her own.

To his anxious inquiries regarding her health he always received the same stereotyped reply—she was quite well—quite—could not desire to be better ; to his attentions she resigned herself passively, as though this resignation were a part of her wifely duty. Nor did she, on her side, neglect to exhibit towards Sydney all those minor courtesies which are so dear and grateful to the heart when they are the spontaneous growth of mutual affection : but this was rather from an impulse of high breeding than from a genuine desire to increase his happiness : and Elphinstone was not slow to see and feel the painful truth.

There was no pleading now for another hour when her husband, immediately after breakfast, day by day lingered for a moment in the hall to caress his boy ere he caught up his hat and gloves, and with a hasty kiss upon her brow, hurried off to town ; no inquiry as to the probable hour of his return ; nothing but a calm and unquestioning submission to his will,



an apparent indifference to his movements, which had gradually built up a wall of ice between them, that sent its bitter chill to the hearts of both.

Scarcely, however, had Sydney disappeared, and her child been placed in her arms, than Ida passionately pressed her lips upon the rosy little cheek still flushed from the pressure of her husband's kiss ; while hot tears, long and painfully suppressed, streamed down her face, and fell into her bosom. She had ceased to trust, but she still loved him with the whole vehemence of her ungoverned nature.

Poor Ida ! with all the elements of happiness within her reach, she was hopelessly, irremediably wretched. Her capricious inconsistencies, her wayward fits of temper, had seriously alienated the affection of Lady Malcolm, who had, moreover, resolutely refused to expose her daughter to a constant companionship with Mrs. Darnell, to whose mind and manners she alike objected ; nor had she failed

to impress upon Ida the inexpediency of encouraging her visits. This advice was, however, at once rejected, as the ill-fated woman instantly attributed to her right-minded and well-judging friend a motive totally foreign to the real one, and felt a bitter pleasure in disregarding her advice.

Still for Sydney's sake, Lady Malcolm resolutely supported the occasional annoyances to which she was exposed through the waywardness of his wife; nor was it long ere she discovered that Mrs. Elphinstone had some hidden sorrow, and then the warm stream of her woman-heart welled up, and she forgot her own feelings in her anxious endeavour to soothe those of Ida.

Vain, however, was the attempt; her inferences were disdainfully denied; how, she was asked, could the wife of Sydney Elphinstone—the wife who had abandoned everything for his sake, and to whom his affection was all in all—be otherwise than happy, most happy?

“Were you indeed aware that he had ceased to love me;” she pursued with a kindling eye; “you might suspect that I was the victim of a hidden grief; but now——”

“You misconceive me, my dear Mrs. Elphinstone;” replied her companion, mildly; “I have had so sad an experience of the world, that I too well know how possible it is to have a sorrow totally unconnected with home and home-affections. Did I dare to do so, I believe that I could point to the cause of your evident depression.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed Ida, scornfully.

“Yes, indeed;” pursued Lady Malcolm; “can you imagine that I have never reflected upon the suffering with which you must dwell upon the estrangement from your parents? Surely not; and from the bottom of my heart I pity you. Have courage, my dear young friend: remember that there is a silver lining to every cloud; your father must have loved you deeply; have regarded you with pride as

well as affection ; and rest assured that when once the wound which you have inflicted upon his ambition has had time to heal, his heart will yearn towards you with a tenderness which he will not seek to control."

"I can only pray that your prophecy may be fulfilled before I have ceased to feel an interest in any thing;" said Mrs. Elphinstone, moodily ; "for Hubert's sake I will hope, even when I cease to do so for myself."

"In that case judge of your father's heart by your own ;" replied her persevering comforter ; "and do I entreat of you, struggle against a depression which is evidently undermining your health. I can see that Sydney is wretched about you."

"Sydney wretched about me !" echoed Ida, with a forced laugh ; "I do not think that Sydney was ever more happy in his life. During the first few months of our marriage he was my devoted slave, poor fellow ! obedient to all my caprices : subject to all my

whims; and it was then, or never, that I might have supposed him to be wretched about me, as I must necessarily have involved him in every dangerous or disagreeable fancy in which I saw fit to indulge; but he is now altogether released from this peril; I have grown weary of practising upon his patience; he is perfectly independent in all his actions; he comes and goes, unquestioned; I make no demand upon either his time or his tenderness; but receive with proper wifely gratitude the portion of each, which he finds it expedient and proper to bestow upon me."

"My dear young friend, you terrify me!" said Lady Malcolm uneasily; "you are in a frightfully morbid state of mind; and I sadly fear that, from some misconception or another, you are doing serious injustice to your husband."

"Oh no, no; do not alarm yourself about *him*;" was the quick retort; "I can assure you that he makes no complaint; and I have

not a doubt, from his regular and unwearied attendance at the Temple, that his affairs are prospering there also. It is really admirable, is it not, Lady Malcolm, to see how pertinaciously he pursues his profession? for, as I never hear of his spending the hours that he is absent from me elsewhere, I naturally conclude that he is at his chambers."

Her companion started; had Ida laid bare her heart before her, she could not more thoroughly have read its secret than she did at that moment. Mrs. Elphinstone was the victim of jealousy, but who could be the object of her suspicion? Vainly did Lady Malcolm ask herself the question; Sydney had, at the request of his wife, so utterly abandoned the world, that the only conclusion at which she could arrive was that Ida might possibly have been informed of some previous attachment on the part of her husband, which, now that the first effervescence of married happiness has subsided,

was pressing upon her mind ; and even while she condemned such a weakness, the gentle-hearted matron could not withhold her sympathy for the self-tormenting sufferer.

“ Will you forgive me, my dear Mrs. Elphinstone ;” she asked ; “ if I hazard another guess ?—I cannot mistake your meaning—you doubt Sydney.”

“ Have I any cause to do so ?”

“ Certainly none of which I am aware.”

“ In that case ;” observed Ida haughtily ; “ you might have spared me the suspicion.”

Lady Malcolm rose.

“ I am truly glad to find that I am in error ;” she said with dignity ; “ rejoiced alike for your own sake, and Sydney’s, for believe me, Mrs. Elphinstone, when I assure you that no weakness on the part of a wife is so calculated to estrange a husband’s heart as jealousy ; where the suspicion is just he becomes irritated under his own sense of error, and

where he is conscious of his own rectitude, he revolts from an accusation which robs the woman he has chosen of that charm of mental purity which had hitherto compelled his admiration and respect.

“I am, therefore, I repeat, most happy that I had wronged you, and you must pardon my offence, arising as it did out of my maternal anxiety for your mutual welfare.”

“All apology is unnecessary;” was the cold reply; “and I am really happy, in my turn, to have set your heart at rest. Question Sydney yourself, and I am convinced he will tell you that, however exacting I may have been for a time, I am now the very model of a wife. Oh, depend upon it, my dear Lady Malcolm, that should we again emerge from our hermitage, we shall be quoted as a marvel of connubial devotion; a species of shew couple to be gazed upon with awe and admiration; a fitting example in fact, for my cousin Hubert and your fair daughter; and more than this



I am sure you cannot be unreasonable enough to wish."

Ida had overacted her part, but her companion was too judicious to suffer her to perceive this, although her heart ached as she slowly walked along the garden-path which led to her own house.

"Poor Sydney! Poor fated boy!" she murmured to herself; "this is even worse than I had feared. I have indeed lived to rejoice that *she* is in her grave, whose heart his misery would have broken. Yes—it is better so; this crowning sorrow she at least is spared."

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE FIRST BRIEF.

As a natural consequence of the state of things which we have described, Sydney Elphinstone gradually estranged himself more and more from his ungenial home; and, with the impetuosity which formed so strong an element of his character, plunged into study with an ardour and perseverance that enabled him for many hours in the day to banish from his mind all memory of the blight which had withered the best feelings of his heart.

Shut into his chambers, half-buried with books, and grappling with difficulties from

which he had hitherto shrunk with disgust, the gay young man of fashion had subsided into a plodding student; lines of thought began to trace themselves upon his lofty brow; his step became less buoyant, and his words more measured.

The youth was rapidly ripening into the sober maturity of manhood; and if he rarely smiled, and the music of his ringing laughter was no longer heard, at least neither had been succeeded by the querulousness of discontent, or the gloom of asceticism.

Towards his wife he still exhibited the same watchful attention and courteous kindness as ever, but it was no longer with the lover-like devotion of old; care had aged him in more than looks; and while Ida wept in secret over a change which wrung the chords of her heart to agony, and remembered that it had been her own work, she bore it in silence rather than by one concession make an effort to repair the evil.

“How know I,” she would murmur to herself, “that the hours of his absence are, indeed, spent in study? How dare I even hope it, when I am so well aware that all mental exertion is antagonistic to his careless and impulsive nature? Could I only be sure that such were the case, how different would be our relative position !

“But no, no ; I must not yield ; it is clear from his continual and consistent coldness that his heart is no longer in his home, and that it has found another resting-place. Be it so ; I will endure the suspicion until it has grown into certainty, and then—then—”

A month or two passed on thus : and at their close the earnest prayer of Elphinstone was granted—he held a brief : nor was it the least agreeable or welcome feature of this long-wished-for event, that it had been offered to him at the desire of Lady Malcolm, who had at length decided on endeavouring to rescue at least a portion of her property from

the unworthy hands into which it had fallen.

Information recently acquired had convinced her that her case was far from a hopeless one, if skilfully conducted; and, much as she shrank from the excitement and uncertainty of a lawsuit, she still felt that she owed a duty to her child which must be performed even at the expense of her own feelings; while the consciousness that she had it in her power at the same time to serve the son of her still-lamented friend greatly tended to reconcile her to the anxiety of the trial.

Thus then, when he had almost despaired of such a result to his labours, and had pursued them rather as a resource from more painful thought than as the necessary means to accomplish a career, Sydney found himself suddenly summoned to exert all his energies in a cause in which the best powers of his heart and intellect must be alike called forth.

His cheek glowed, and his breast heaved

with excitement; he was now to try his strength—he was now to prove to Ida that her faith in his intellect at least had not been misplaced; she had ceased to love him, but he might still compel her respect; and then a shadow fell over his joy: how differently might he have gone forth to meet his first struggle, strengthened by her encouragement, elated by her conviction of his coming triumph. The blood faded from his brow, and fell back cold upon his heart; he still grasped the important document, but half its spell was broken.

Then he roused himself; he remembered that he was to be associated in his task with one of the most eminent counsel in England; and that he must endeavour by his industry and care to render himself worthy of such an association; that he must not suffer the success of a cause which involved the future independence of Edith Malcolm to be secured solely by the eloquence of Sir F—— T——,

but that he must labour assiduously to convince his co-adjutor that, inexperienced as he was, he was nevertheless worthy of the trust which had been reposed in him.

His facilities for obtaining every information relative to the case were necessarily great; and many an hour was spent at the villa of Lady Malcolm over papers and documents, or in confidential conversation connected with the one important subject; hours which Ida might have known to be so spent, had she ever stooped to ask one question as to the manner in which he passed his time; but this she never did: and when Sydney, in the exuberance of his exultation, informed her of the fact of his having received his first brief from Lady Malcolm, she congratulated him so coldly on the event that, stung to the very heart, he never again alluded to the subject, save to apologise for the lengthened absences to which he was compelled by the exigencies of his occupation.

Thus it was from her kind and sympathising acquaintance Mrs. Darnell alone, that she learnt the fact of her husband's long and frequent visits to the mother of Edith; visits which were considered by both ladies as Elphinstone's chosen relaxation in his intervals of leisure.

"Was I not right to warn you?" was the triumphant inquiry of the visitor on such occasions; "and what will you do now?"

"I will wait," was the unvarying reply.

And Ida did wait; and meanwhile, brooding over her imagined wrongs, her gloom and coldness increased; and had not the mind of her husband been absorbed by the one great interest of the moment—the pivot upon which he felt that all his future fortunes must necessarily turn,—it would have been impossible to have longer delayed an explanation which must have proved fatal to every hope of domestic happiness for ever.

As it was, however, Sydney perseveringly pursued his system of conciliation and kind-



ness ; spoke cheerfully and fondly to his wife ; caressed his child with a tenderness and pride which even trial and disappointment had failed to diminish ; and endeavoured by every means in his power to recal, were it only for a moment, the smiles of happier days.

Every comfort and even luxury permitted by their slender means he lavished upon Ida unsparingly ; but accustomed to other and far more costly indulgencies, she had begun to disregard those which she still enjoyed, and to regret others which were beyond her reach.

Suffering had made her selfish ; had she not, by her one fatal fault, thrown happiness far from her ? had she still trusted as deeply as she loved, she would have jested at every privation, and been careless of every sacrifice ; but now it was far otherwise ; the constant companionship of a coarse mind had produced its effect ; and she even felt a weak pride in upholding without murmur or reproach the character of a victim.

“Poor dear Mrs. Elphinstone ! You really excite my wonder ;” was the frequent exclamation of her confidential friend ; “I cannot understand such fortitude and patience.”

But Ida was not strong ; she was not patient ; she was simply ungenerous and unjust. Was there no tacit murmur in the averted eye and the rigid lip ? no reproach in the moodiness of manner, and ungenial coldness of deportment, which checked the warm and honest impulses of her husband’s heart, and left him to fight his battle with the world, destitute alike of home sympathy and support.

Had she been made to comprehend the bitterness of his feelings in this utter isolation, she would have smiled, and gloried in the miserable triumph ; and gloried the more, because, even while she was thus torturing his noble and forbearing nature, she felt that he was necessary to her existence ; that she still loved him beyond all else on earth—even beyond her child—none knew or guessed how,

in the solitary hours, she dwelt with intense and agitating anxiety upon his coming trial—how she prayed for his success—how she yearned to throw herself upon his neck, and send him forth strong in the armour of a wife and a woman's love.

But no: in these moments of spiritual healthfulness, ever uprose the vision of Edith Malcolm, while the insidious venom of Mrs. Darnell's inferences fell like molten metal upon her mind's ear, scorching and withering all her better and purer impulses.

"He will be armed with *her* affection—he will be strong in *her* cause"—was ever the climax of her reverie. "It would be idle indeed for me to stand forth as his champion: one word of encouragement from *her* will suffice to arouse his best energies to action: and so let it be. For my boy's sake I will bear the burthen, heavy as it is, until its weight threatens to crush me to the earth: and then he shall be made to feel that I will not fall alone."

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE EARLY LOST.

WHILE the cloud thus darkened over the modest cottage at Brompton, suffering in a more tangible shape had made its abode under the stately roof of Trevanion Hall. The heir of that ancient house—the idol of his father's heart—the object of many a hope, and many a sigh—was rapidly sinking into a premature grave.

Hubert Trevanion, whose manly beauty and moral worth had endeared him to every heart, had ceased to struggle against the conviction that he was the destined victim of the insidious disease which had long been sapping the prin-

ciple of existence ; and while the preternaturally bright eye and blooming cheek deceived the fond father into a belief that a life of happiness and honour awaited his darling son, that son himself felt with a resignation rare and beautiful under such circumstances, that for him there existed no future upon earth.

Day by day, and almost hour by hour, he became aware that the silver cord was loosened, gently and gradually, but not the less surely.

Often did he yearn to throw one gleam of light upon his father's mind ; to awaken him to at least a possibility of their early separation ; but his strength of purpose was insufficient for the effort. He felt that he *dared* not turn the proud and exulting happiness of his last parent into bitterness and mourning.

“ The blow will come soon enough, come when it may ;” he would murmur to himself, as he listened with a brow steeped in the chilly moisture of exhaustion, and with closed eyes,

to the projects of the unconscious baronet, in all of which he was necessarily involved; and while Sir Jasper talked with enthusiasm of the fair young creature who would, as he trusted, ere long become the mistress of the Hall, Hubert, instead of a wedding-garment, saw only a shroud; instead of wedded bliss, reveling in light and life, only inanition and a grave.

With mistaken and persevering affection he continued, however, to rally his failing energies, and little did those who saw him the companion of his father's rides and walks, the indefatigable sharer in all his pursuits, and the anxious promoter of all his enjoyments, imagine at what a price the devoted son at length purchased the privilege of brightening and gladdening the declining years of his self-deceived parent.

Often, after a long attendance in a heated justice-room, or a rapid gallop over the downs, when the baronet returned home excited and refreshed by a sense of duty performed, or a

healthful sensation of augmented vigour, his son, after a painful effort of simulated strength, no sooner found himself alone in his chamber than he tottered to a couch, where, bathed in the cold and clammy dews of consumption, and labouring for breath, he lay shivering and helpless, until by the aid of some powerful stimulant, he once more recovered sufficient energy to resume the wasting struggle.

At the close of a few months, however, this tearful exertion became no longer possible. His physical powers were exhausted; the flush upon his cheek deepened and concentrated itself into a burning spot; the fire of the large dark eye gleamed keen and cold; and this noble form became attenuated and feeble. Whispers circulated among the household, and many and earnest were the anxious looks turned on him by the grey-haired retainers of the family.

“It was thus,” said the most aged among

them, "that his grandfather had died—it was thus that he would die ; the child of prayers and hopes, in whom his father had garnered up all his affections, for whom his mother had hoarded all her wealth."

It was strange, very strange, that Sir Jasper did not see that he was perishing before his eyes : but, at length, came the low and hollow cough, that sound of doom which can never be mistaken ; the slight but painful spasm by which it was succeeded ; the quivering of the wasted hand ; the uncertain accents, which at intervals rendered the once melodious voice hoarse and discordant ; and then indeed, even the doating father, whose pride in his only son had hitherto cast out fear, could no longer delude himself with the belief that all was well with the object of his idolatry.

The blow smote the stately old man to the earth ; and in the first agony of his grief he gave way to a vehemence of feeling which had nearly proved fatal to the invalid. Medical



assistance was summoned from far and near—there *must* yet be hope.

Alas! there was none. The fiat had gone forth; and Hubert Trevanion, the last representative of his ancient family, gifted with all that the world can offer to its favourites—youth, and wealth, and intellect—a noble person, and a heart rich in the best and holiest impulses of human nature, was about to share the common fate of all created beings.

No mortal skill, even although purchased with the ransom of a kingdom, could avail him now; and he learnt his fate from the friendly physician—who had been induced, at his own entreaty, to name the probable period of his release from suffering—without the quivering of a pulse.

“My poor father!” was all he said as he ascertained that his very hours were numbered; “how will he bear this blow?”

“Sir Jasper is a man and a Christian, my dear Sir;” observed his companion soothingly.

“But he is also a father ;” murmured Hubert, as he swept back the masses of dark hair which clung dankly about his brow ; “and so strong a link cannot be wrenched asunder without a struggle too powerful for his age. I must not, however, dwell upon this painful thought, or it may unnerve me when he most requires my support.”

“Right, right ;” said the physician ; “you must strive to keep up both his spirits and your own, difficult as it may be to do so ; but you are equal to the effort, as I well know.”

Hubert smiled sadly ; for himself he was resigned ; he had long felt that his doom was sealed, and that he was predestined to an early death ; but he could not so certainly contemplate the suffering of a father to whom he knew that he was all in all ; and while, had he been alone in the world, he could have yielded his last sigh almost without regret, he felt a yearning to live for his father’s sake, which shook him to the very depths of his spirit.

“Thank you for your frankness;” he said, as, at the close of a violent paroxysm of coughing, he withdrew the handkerchief from his lips, and held it towards his medical friend, deeply stained with blood; “although, as you see, all further attempt at self-delusion would be useless on my part, even were I weak enough to encourage it; and now I have a last favour to ask of you——”

“Name it.”

“Will you undertake to break the truth to my poor father? the whole truth, I mean. For the abstract fact of my early death he is already prepared; but I would fain see him reconciled to the probability, nay, the certainty, of its almost immediate occurrence. Will you oblige me in this?”

“I cannot.”

“And wherefore?”

“Because I have been acquainted with Sir Jasper for the last forty years,” said Dr. Fernley; “and am well aware that although, like all his

fellow-men, he has had many annoyances to combat, he has never yet been subjected to the searching trial of a great sorrow. Some one who has less regard for him than myself must undertake the task."

"Yet who could perform it so tenderly?"

"You mistake, my young friend, you mistake;" said the worthy doctor with an emotion which sufficiently attested his sincerity. "It must be done by one who will not feel *with* him as well as *for* him. It is the only request of yours with which I cannot comply."

"I regret it deeply;" replied Hubert; "for in that case, painful as the effort will be, I must communicate the fact myself. I could not bear that his first and bitter grief should be exposed to the eye of a stranger, or a hireling."

"It will destroy you!"

"No;" said the dying man firmly; "my last act will have been one of duty, even of mercy, and that consciousness will give me

strength; but it must be done at once, for I dare not dwell on the trial that is before me; I should only multiply my own moments of suffering."

"Let me entreat of you, Mr. Trevanion—"

"Nay, nay, do not unman me unnecessarily before-hand; my purpose is fixed, and I am too physically weak to contend, although morally strong enough to persist in my purpose. Only do me the favour to be present at our interview; he may need your assistance,—perhaps I may even need it myself."

"Only wait until to-morrow."

"That were worse than useless. My poor father! He has now but little time for preparation; why should I, by my cowardice, seek to abridge it? Surely it is wiser and better that his grief should have time to subside into resignation before——"

"Well, well; be it as you will;" said his companion reluctantly; "but I own that I could have wished——"

“You will comply with my request ;” interposed Hubert with a sad smile ; “and I thank you. Saunders shall summon his master at once, and my first and most bitter pang will then be over.”

“The physician was silent ; for, even while he admired the courage and self-abnegation of his patient, he shrank from its probable result.

Ten minutes afterwards the baronet, with bowed head and unsteady step, entered the sick-room.

An hour passed away. There are periods, or at least, there is ever one period in the lives of even the most favoured of human beings, when an age of suffering may be compressed into one brief hour of existence ; but although the anxious watchers in Sir Jasper’s household, dreading they knew not what, and fearing to question their own hearts, lingered near the door of the death-chamber, no sound escaped thence from which they might infer

what was passing within ; the arrow which enters the heart does its work noiselessly ; nor was it until they saw their master come forth leaning on the arm of Dr. Fernley, bent as though the weight of twenty additional years had suddenly fallen upon him, turning meekly and unquestioningly in the direction where he was led, his eyes glossy and tearless, and the muscles about his mouth quivering as though he no longer retained any power over their action, that they understood how surely all hope was at an end.

Morning broke, clear, and cold, and grey ; the birds began to twitter among the boughs, and the deer to shake the dew from their dappled hides, and to emerge from their nightly covert. The lowing of cattle came upon the wind, and at distant intervals the cheerful whistle of the early hind was audible from the low pasture-lands. The world was once more awake ; but on a sumptuous bed, in a darkened room, surrounded by all the

appliances of wealth and all the cares of affection, lay one for whom sight and sound could no more be, and for whom there was no awakening upon earth.

Hubert Trevanion had passed away for ever, and so calmly, that his anxious watchers could not even guess at what precise moment the dreamless sleep which so mysteriously transforms the living sentient being into the dull, inert, and passionless atom retaining nothing of humanity save its outward semblance, had fallen upon him.

The dead was at peace; at peace in his manly beauty; another brief week, and he would be but a memory; while by his side sat his grey-haired father, who had stolen to the death-room, as noiselessly as though his muffled step would have disturbed the sleeper.

His quick ear had caught and interpreted the hurried whispers of the attendants; and without the utterance of a word, he had mo-



tioned them all from the room, fastened the door behind him, and sat down tearlessly beside his dead son.

Close to the pillow that supported his head ; so close that his thick laboured breath heaved the dark curls which rested on the spotless cambric ; and sometimes he clutched at the sheet by which the body was covered, and sometimes he passed his hand slowly over the noble features, as if to impress their outlines more forcibly upon his memory.

Morning brightened, and the eastern sky became one prism of glory ; the song of the wild birds pealed out an universal chorus, from which the clear and exulting notes of the early lark detached themselves like the triumphant outgushing of an emancipated soul ascending in rapture far above the dregs and dross of earth. Nature was gladdened by the birth of a new day ; and the sons of toil were already entering upon its duties ; but still the death-chamber was closed.

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“This must not be—this should not have been”—exclaimed Dr. Fernley, the noise of whose carriage-wheels had been the first sound which awoke upon the deep silence of the mansion; “why were you so imprudent as to permit your master to shut himself in with his dead son? The door must be opened instantly.” ●

Vain, however, were all his efforts to obtain admission; there was no answer to his earnest appeals, and at length the lock was forced, when the unfortunate old man was found stretched across the body of his son, as insensible as the pale form upon which he rested.

Hours passed ere he was restored to consciousness; and even then, his return to existence was pitiable. Obedient as a child, he complied with every request, and resigned himself to every arrangement with a vague, unmeaning smile, which betrayed that he had lost all power of volition; at intervals he wrung his hands, and murmured out “My

son! my son!" But these intervals were rare, and for days he continued a mere human machine, mindless and will-less.

Under these circumstances, Dr. Fernley, who had established himself at the Hall, had no alternative save to ascertain the name and address of his nearest relative, in order that he might be summoned to superintend the arrangements which were imperative under the circumstances; and accordingly an express was dispatched to Mr. Trevanion, the nephew who had been for so many years an exile from his ancestral home, and who was thus suddenly called upon to assume the duties of its master.

The last sad offices were performed for the dead, while the bereaved father sat supinely in his cushioned chair, clad in a suit of sables over which his dull eye glanced without perception or emotion, and the long-estranged relative who had never exchanged one sentence with his heir, officiated as chief-mourner at his funeral.

And then Mr. Trevanion entered upon the more onerous responsibilities of his position. At the express request of the family physician, a consultation was held upon the unhappy baronet, whose mental condition was declared to be beyond hope, although his bodily health still promised, as they unanimously declared, to withstand the shock.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## SOLITARY REFLECTIONS.

“AND now, gentlemen ;” said Mr. Trevanion, as the party withdrew from the chamber of the sufferer; “I must, before we separate, request that I may be favoured with your advice regarding my unfortunate uncle. I have personal duties to perform which entirely preclude the possibility of my residence at the Hall, or my own superintendence of his health and comfort, which must be my first consideration. All other points are of minor importance, and may bide their time.

“That Sir Jasper Trevanion has executed a Will there can be no doubt, while it is equally certain that it must have been made in favour of his son; there cannot, therefore, exist any necessity for torturing him by efforts (which would, moreover, in all probability prove abortive) to make him comprehend the necessity of such a precaution; even did his present state of mind hold out any prospect that such a document, executed under such circumstances, could be considered as a legal one.

“All I apprehend, therefore, that can be done, is to ensure his perfect comfort and convenience so long as he is spared; and I am anxious that those should be scrupulously and efficiently secured. As I know little of the personal tastes or idiosyncracies of my uncle, I am by no means qualified to decide on the most desirable mode of effecting such an object; nor should I feel satisfied to follow the suggestions of mere domestics, who, however

attached to their afflicted master, may err in their estimate of his requirements. I therefore appeal to you, I shall feel gratified by your assistance."

"Frank and manly, Mr. Trevanion;" said Sir D—— D——; "but no more than I should have anticipated from *you*. Your position, as regards the invalid, is difficult and peculiar, but he could not have fallen into better hands. You are right; he is powerless now, and you can afford to forget the past."

"After the scene which I have just witnessed;" was the reply; "the past is only to be regretted. I have learnt a stern lesson in that silent room. I now feel only that Sir Jasper Trevanion is my nearest kinsman, and the head of my house."

"And in that house let him remain, my good Sir;" broke in Dr. C——; "it would be like rending the ivy from the oak, to remove him from his old and accustomed home."

"I am quite of that opinion;" said Mr.

Trevanion ; “and, moreover, that the attendants to whom he has become habituated should also remain about him. With two of them I am myself familiar, as they were already installed here in my boyhood, and have grown grey in the service of their master. I have had interviews with both since my arrival, and they are anxious to end their days under the roof which has for so many years been their only home. I know them to be thoroughly trustworthy ; and I think that could Sir Jasper be consulted on the subject, he would be as desirous as myself that they should retain their present sway over his household.”

“You allude, of course,” remarked Dr. Fernley ; “to Mrs. Pearson and Tomkins ?”

“I do.”

“Admirably decided. In fact, I do not see how the services of either one or the other could now be dispensed with ; the worthy old housekeeper is worth her weight in gold in a



sick-room, while her co-adjutor is equally valuable in his own department."

"We will, if you please, gentlemen, put his abilities to the test;" said the merchant, as he laid his hand upon the bell; "after your hurried journey you must require some refreshment."

As no objection was raised to the suggestion, a speedy adjournment was made to the dining-room; where, enlivened by a well-spread board, and some of the choicest wines from the baronet's cellar, the sufferings of the invalid himself were soon forgotten by the professional brethren, who entered into a political discussion, with as much earnestness as they had previously done into the ailments of their patient; while Mr. Trevanion, seated at the head of that table to which he had been so grudgingly admitted in his youth, was compelled to take his part in the conversation, and to affect an interest which he was far from feeling in the subject of their discourse, occu-

pied as he then was with objects of more personal consideration and anxiety.

“It strikes me, Mr. Trevanion ;” observed Sir D—— D——, as he dissected a partridge ; “that you would do well to ingratiate yourself with the landholders of the county, to whom, as I am informed, you are almost, if not entirely, a stranger. Take my word for it that we are on the eve of a general election, and it would be idle to stand on ceremony under present circumstances. Sir Jasper, poor man ! is naturally *hors de combat*, and you are his most fitting successor. I have some interest here myself, and shall be most happy to exert it in your favour.”

“In that case we shall have a contest ;” said Dr. Fernley ; “as Lord Dronemore has long been anxious to start his elder son.”

“What ! The poet who has just returned from the Pyramids ?”

“The same.”

“But, my good Sir, we want politicians,

not poets, in the Lower House ;” interposed Dr. C—— ; “ sound practical men, who care little to hear themselves talk ; working bees, who will know how to store their own hive—not honourable tourists who scatter their honey that others may hoard it.”

“ Perhaps so ; but I still adhere to my opinion. What say you, Mr. Trevanion ?”

“ Simply, that I never intend to offer myself to the electors of ——, until I have a stake in the county.”

“ Unfortunately,” observed Sir D—— D——, with a courtly inclination of the head ; “ the prospect is by no means a remote one, and the subject appears to me to be worthy of consideration.”

“ Had I a son——” commenced the merchant.

“ You have, I believe, a grandson,” said Dr. Fernley.

Mr. Trevanion started. The existence of Ida’s child had been a forbidden topic in his

presence from the moment of its birth ; and he was consequently unprepared for so abrupt a reminder. The stern man had resolved to forget the fact himself ; and, as a natural consequence with one of his peculiar character, he had calculated that others would follow his example.

“ My grandson is not a Trevanion ;” he remarked coldly.

“ True ; but that circumstance does not militate against the fact that he is heir-presumptive to the baronetcy.”

The merchant winced again.

“ And a fine little fellow he is ;” pursued the pertinacious physician ; “ I never saw a more noble boy.”

“ You are a fortunate man, Sir ;” said Dr. C——, who was entirely ignorant of the family history ; “ and we will, with your permission, drink to the young man’s health in a bumper of this splendid hock.”

Mr. Trevanion bowed stiffly, as his guests

prepared to do honour to the proposed pledge; he even raised the glass to his lips as the toast was drunk, but the cool liquid seemed to scorch him, and not one word of acknowledgement followed the draught.

“And now, gentlemen;” said Dr. Fernley, to whom the silence which succeeded was perfectly intelligible; “I must request of you to excuse me, as I have two important visits to make before sunset.”

“While I,” followed up Sir D—— D——; “must be back in town to-night, and consequently have little time to spare. It is wonderful how the hours fly by when one is pleasantly engaged.”

“While your carriages are preparing;” said the family physician; “will you allow me to suggest that we should take a parting look at our unfortunate friend Sir Jasper?”

“By all means;” was the ready reply, and once more the party ascended to the baronet’s sick room, but every effort to rouse him into

mental consciousness again failed ; and the men of science finally departed, leaving the weary and irritated merchant alone in the vast and lonely mansion.

Then it was, that, abandoned to himself, and left to wrestle with his own thoughts for the first time since this signal change has taken place in his social position, Mr. Trevanion keenly felt the isolation which his own vindictive passions had created about him.

The garrulous old physician was right ; he had a grandson, and that grandson must, one day should he live to manhood, inherit the lordly estates, and the proud title of his ancestors, while the daughter whom he had cast forth, alike from his heart and from his hearth, would rule over a splendid home for which she would be indebted to her son and not to him.

The thought was wormwood to him ! And then, as his eye travelled over the vast dimensions of the gorgeous rooms in which he sat, he pictured to himself the crouching insignifi-

cant form of his wife, who would probably at an early period become its temporary mistress, and with a sensation of disgust and scorn, he rose and paced the floor like one suddenly awakened to a sense of injury.

The frivolous Miss Clara Rotheringbury, the inert and mindless Mrs. Hubert Trevanion, to fill the place of his own beautiful and high-born mother! The proud man shuddered as he contemplated such a contingency, while slowly and uninvoked, there rose up before him the radiant vision of his daughter; that daughter, whose beauty and whose grace had flattered his vanity, and satisfied his pride; and like one under the influence of mesmerism, unable to contend against a will stronger than his own, the picture broadened and deepened until she seemed to stand before him with her infant in her arms, her proud brow glowing with matronly dignity, and her eyes bright with natural love.

It was a splendid picture, and the mer-

chant's heart throbbed as he lingered on it; but after awhile he shook off the spell.

"Perhaps it must be so;" he murmured to himself; "but not yet—not yet—Hubert Trevanion will not forgive, even if *Sir* Hubert be ultimately compelled to do so. I am still master of my own actions; and when no longer able to control them, I must e'en follow the example of the French prince, and not suffer the long-descended baronet to revenge the injuries of the money-seeking merchant. Yet, when I remember that she might have entered this house as a peeress, it almost maddens me!

"And to think too that *he*—that the vain boy who, by a few idle flatteries, blighted all my views—that *he* may one day play the master here—I could almost wish that the poor old man who crushed my youth, and who now in his helplessness cannot resist the slightest of my wishes, might live on until the world and the world's honours had ceased to hold out



any charm to the penniless adventurer who robbed me of my daughter."

It was fortunate that, at this period of his self-communing, Mr. Trevanion chanced to remember that he had still many and important duties to perform before he left the Hall ; and with his habitual energy he immediately prepared to execute them. There were solicitors and land-stewards to consult and instruct ; tenants to receive, servants to discharge, and a host of minor arrangements to make, as essential as they were harassing.

At length, however, all was accomplished. The papers of Sir Jasper, including his will, of which a duplicate was in the possession of his attorney, were duly examined and sealed ; the family diamonds and those of the late Lady Trevanion, all of which had been recently reset for the destined bride of the unhappy Hubert, together with the costly service of plate, were transferred, under the care of Tompkins, to the baronet's banker in town ;

leases that were falling in were renewed, in accordance with the instructions previously given by Sir Jasper; the wages of the several servants retained at the Hall were doubled; the stud was reduced, and all the equipages, save one, were disposed of.

Nothing, in short, remained to be done, when Mr. Trevanion took his departure from the Hall, which could conduce to the convenience or security of its afflicted master; while so ably had the still active Pearson seconded his efforts that, while in the apartments tenanted by the baronet all was luxury and comfort, even the strong-minded merchant felt his heart sink with a strange sensation of awe and repulsion as he traversed the spacious suite of state-rooms, and found their gorgeous draperies and stately mirrors shrouded in their Holland coverings. Life seemed indeed to have been put out in the home of his fathers.

“I shall close the gallery altogether, Sir, as soon as you are gone;” said the ancient house-

keeper in a low voice, as she followed him in his last circuit of the mansion, her voluminous black garments sweeping with melancholy monotony along the uncarpeted floors ; “ and only open it to air the rooms, and to dust the furniture, all of which will of course be done under my own eye. You know that you can trust me, Master Hubert—I beg pardon, Sir ; I meant to have said, Mr. Trevanion ; but really now, when all seems to have passed away except yourself, my old brain is clearer about early days than on what is going on about me. Poor Sir Jasper ! To think that he who was a boy to me, should have come to this, while I am still hale and able ; it is strange and sad indeed, Sir, is it not ? And that dear boy—the sweetest youth that ever trod the earth, gone too ! How often he made me talk of you, Master Hubert, and tell him how, although you went out from these doors without a friend, to seek your fortune in the wide world, you came to be a great and a

rich man, the companion of proud lords, and a guest in the king's palace."

"But how came you to know all this, my good Pearson?" demanded the merchant with a curiosity which he could not repress.

"Oh, Sir; we always knew all about you;" was the eager reply; as planting the stick by which she was compelled to support herself while walking, the aged woman suddenly stopped in order to give greater emphasis to her words; "for you were no sooner gone than Sir Jasper, poor dear gentleman! began to have a thousand fears about you; and although he never dared to name your name before her ladyship, he often talked to Tompkins and his own man about his unhappy nephew; and I do believe, Master Hubert, that if you had only bent your pride to write a letter to my master, and to ask him——"

"I had nothing to ask of him, Pearson."

"More's the pity, Sir, more's the pity that

you had not; for then we should have had happier hearts at the old hall."

"So then I am to understand that Sir Jasper—that my uncle—really did regret his harshness when it was too late."

"Indeed he did, Master Hubert, indeed he did; and of late years, since my lady died, often and often did he and his poor dear son tell me how honoured and how happy you were, and what a credit you were to the family name; and that you had a daughter so beautiful that she might have married the greatest lord in the land."

"And so she might;" said the merchant bitterly; "but she did not."

"So I heard, Sir, so I heard; but then Sir Jasper learnt from her own lips that she had wedded the man of her heart; and such a boy as she had, my master said; it was really wonderful to hear him talk of that child; and of course you know, Sir, that the poor youth you laid to rest only a few days back was to

have been his godfather, although he was too ill to go up to town for the christening."

"Ha! indeed!" exclaimed her startled listener; "was Mr. Hubert Trevanion really to have been the sponsor of Master Sydney Elphinstone?"

"Of your daughter's son, Sir;" said Pearson; "but he was to be called Hubert; the young lady would have it so, they told me, because it was her father's name."

"It is cold here, my good Pearson;" said the merchant huskily; "let us leave these desolate-looking rooms. Poor Sir Jasper! How much I wish that he could recognise me before I leave."

"No, Sir, no; there is no hope of that;" whispered the housekeeper mysteriously; "my master's mind will not come back to this world till he is about to leave it altogether; and then it will be but a blink of light, faint and feeble, so that soul and body may go together."

“A strange doctrine that, my good old friend;” smiled Mr. Trevanion; “but we will hope better things. Who knows? The constitution of my uncle’s a sound one, and he may yet rally.”

“Aye,” murmured the aged dame; “he *will* rally, but it will only be at the sound of that trumpet which will call us all from our long sleep. And now you had better go to the dining-room at once, Master Hubert; there is a fine fire there, and your dinner will be served in a few minutes.”

## CHAPTER IX.

## SUNSHINE AND SHADOW.

GREAT was the astonishment of Lady Mary Brooklands, for of the actual mistress of the house there was no question, when she was requested by Mr. Trevanion on his return to town, to oblige him by putting the female servants of his establishment into the handsomest mourning compatible with their station; and that, at the same time, a hundred-pound note was placed in her hand, with a respectful entreaty that she would be good enough her-



self to appear in the same **sable** habiliments in honour of his deceased relative.

“Do me the favour also, my dear Lady Mary;” he said; “to impress upon Mrs. Trevanion the necessity of wearing the deepest **sables**, for I have almost a twofold death to deplore; as I have not only buried poor Hubert, but have, moreover, left my unfortunate uncle in a state of living death, even worse than actual annihilation. She cannot, as I well know, appreciate the delicacy of my position without your prompting, and I consequently throw myself, as far as she is concerned, upon your accustomed kindness and consideration.”

“Rely on it, that I will do all that is right, my dear Sir;” was the reply of the lady, as she crushed the fragment of tissue paper between her glove and her hand; “and I am sure you will believe me when I say, that your anxiety to do everything in a proper manner, and one suited to your position in the world,

on so melancholy an occasion as this, is precisely what I should have expected from you.

“Dear me!” she pursued, dropping into a chair, and assuming an expression of sentimental sympathy; “what a trying visit yours must have proved, Mr. Trevanion; father and son at one blow—or rather from what you tell me, it would have been less deplorable, had the bereaved old gentleman really followed his child to the grave.”

“There can be no doubt of it;” replied her companion in the same tone; “no doubt on earth of it; for his condition is, as you judiciously remark, indeed deplorable. Mindless and powerless, he retains nothing of humanity but the form; and so long as he survives, I see little hope of any amendment.”

“The affair is altogether very untoward;” observed Lady Mary, carefully examining the pattern of the Valenciennes upon her handkerchief.

"Worse, worse;" said the merchant contracting his heavy eyebrows; "my responsibility has suddenly become most painful."

"But, in a sensible point of view, you are actually the head of the family, and the representative of the Trevanions."

"True; in a sensible point of view, but not in a legal one; I am, in fact, nothing more than the guardian of Sir Jasper, and have neither power nor influence while he lives."

"It is monstrously provoking!" drawled the family friend; "and I know by experience how long, how very long, persons in his peculiar state *do* often live. Where there is no wear on the mind, the body is wonderfully tenacious of existence."

"It is at least consolatory that he suffers no pain;" said Mr. Trevanion, calmly.

"Very,"—was the retort, as the titled matron applied her handkerchief to her nose; "but still—you will excuse me, I know, if I

repeat that the whole thing is nevertheless monstrously provoking. The baronet, by your account, does not live, he only vegetates ; and I confess that, feeling as I do towards yourself, I could have wished——”

“No, no ; I thank you for your interest in my welfare, Lady Mary ;” interposed the merchant, “ but I must not suffer myself to glance at what might have been.”

“Yet he had injured you so deeply.”

“Like many other men who pride themselves upon their moral strength, he was at last compelled to succumb to a stronger will than his own, but I have had satisfactory proof that he repented his harshness when it was too late.”

“I am glad to hear it ;” said Lady Mary ; “if the abstract fact affords you the slightest gratification. And now, my dear Sir, that Ida’s son has become an important little personage in your family, I trust that you will

be induced to pardon her *escapade*. As you are well aware, with all my affection for the dear girl, I have never hitherto presumed to plead her cause."

"I am aware of it, Lady Mary, and have estimated your delicacy at its just value. No—you have never striven, by word or look, to moderate my just resentment."

"I could not venture to do so; my position as a relative of Mr. Elphinstone's was so onerous, that I shrank from every species of interference."

"I fully estimated the reasons of your silence. Had you, like her mother, harassed me by weak repinings and still more idle reproaches, the breach between us could never have been repaired."

"That was precisely what I felt, my dear Sir; but now——"

"Now, Madam, I must have time to reflect. A father whose child deceives him, and

elopes from beneath his roof, leaving him to brave as he best may the comments of the world, merits but little indulgence at the hands of her outraged parent ; and I tell you frankly, Lady Mary Brooklands, that had Mrs. Sydney Elphinstone become the mother of a girl, instead of presenting an heir to the Trevanions, I would have abandoned her for ever to the miserable obscurity of her present lot."

"But as it is?"

"As it is, I shall be ruled by circumstances : I am not yet Sir Hubert Trevanion, and I can afford to wait."

Little did the stern and unrelenting father imagine that his daughter had, like himself, declared her willingness to 'bide her time.'

The disconcerted Lady Mary, who, on the restoration of her nephew's wife to favour, had rapidly built up a cloud-castle of advantage to herself, was too much accustomed to the in-

flexions of Mr. Trevanion's voice and the portentous action of his eyebrows, to prolong the discussion; and accordingly, after having pledged herself to superintend the personal arrangements of Mrs. Trevanion on this important occasion, she hastened to terminate the interview; and so well did she redeem her pledge that within a week the merchant's wife, despite her "dear me's," "how very disagreeable's," and sundry other inane expletives, found herself attired in the deepest sables for a man whom she had never seen, and who she had been taught to regard with aversion as an impediment in her husband's path towards greatness.

Nevertheless, with her usual apathy, she resigned herself to her fate. She had, as we have shown, long ceased to contend; and although on Ida's evasion from the paternal roof, she did, with the true instinct of a mother's heart, for a time revolt against the

inflexible harshness of her husband, the mere force of habit soon crushed her back into her habitual insignificance; and surrounding herself with novels, she endeavoured to forget her own sorrows in those of her favourite heroines, and suffered the titled matron who had usurped her place in the household not only to act but even to think for her.

The mental condition of Mrs. Trevanion in her Richmond Villa was little superior to that of Sir Jasper in his ancestral halls.

Far different was the effect produced by the intelligence of the melancholy events which had taken place in —, on the two families so closely allied by blood and friendship to the baronet and his son.

Upon Lady Malcolm, who had anticipated a life of honour and affection for her gentle Edith, the blow fell heavily indeed; although she derived consolation from the fact that the fair girl herself, however she might, and un-



doubtedly did, admire and respect Hubert Trevanion, had yet seen too little of him to render her sorrow at his loss of more than a temporary nature ; Edith was, in truth, only learning to love him ; her young heart had been awakened but not won ; and though she wept, it was rather in pity for his fate than in regret at her own disappointment ; while her mother, with all a mother's anxiety, looked into the future of her child, and shuddered as she felt how suddenly it had become a void.

Their retired existence, which had hitherto been brightened and gladdened by a thousand innocent and happy projects for the future, had in one brief moment lost its charm ; the one perpetual subject of discourse had become only a theme of sorrow and regret ; the light of their modest dwelling was extinguished ; and as Lady Malcolm, with a troubled eye, followed the movements of her daughter, her

heart swelled, and for the first time in her life she felt disposed to repine.

The grief of Mrs. Elphinstone was twofold ; for even in the brief interviews which had taken place between them, she had learnt to love her long-estranged relatives ; while the only ray of sunshine which her miserable infatuation permitted to fall upon her heart, was the hope of soon being relieved from the presence of Miss Malcolm by her marriage with Hubert Trevanion.

That hope had now passed away for ever ; while the calm and unimpassioned resignation of Edith, who, in the presence of her mother even restrained her tears in order not to augment the distress of her parent, awoke a new suspicion in the self-tormenting mind of Ida.

“ She never loved him ;” she murmured to herself : “ she never loved him, or she would have needed the consolation which she is so eager to afford. What can be the blighted

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ambition of a mother when placed in competition with a heart whose first affection is cast back upon it ?

“No, no ; she would have shed other tears over the grave of Sydney Elphinstone ; her secret passion was hopeless, and she had self-control enough to obey the bidding of her manœuvring parent.

“Poor child ! she is playing her part badly now, when even *I* can detect the truth. Hubert is happy to have escaped a fate like mine ; better to die young—aye, to die a thousand deaths,—than to live on, unloved and neglected, when all the illusions of hope and passion are rent away, and the bleak, bare realities of existence alone remain.”

And with this gratuitous suffering came a renewed feeling of isolation ; the tie which had existed between herself and Sir Jasper, and which was to have been rendered still closer through her child, had greatly tended to re-

concile her to the unrelenting silence of her father, which she now felt with double force.

In the early months of her marriage, the passionate devotion of her husband had sufficed to render her independent of all other affection, and she had consequently endured it with patience and submission as the consequence of her own act; but now, when she believed the heart of Sydney to be estranged from her, she shrank appalled at her loneliness.

There did appear, indeed, no prospect of a reconciliation now, when the unhappy events which had taken place in the family, and which would have afforded so favourable an opportunity for Mr. Trevanion to summon his only child once more to her home, had been coldly and officially announced to her by Sir Jasper's attorney, in precisely the same form as they had been made known to Lady Malcolm.

Never, until this moment, had Mrs. Elphin-

stone confessed, even to herself, that she had involuntarily looked beyond the affection to the generosity of her uncle ; and it was, consequently, with terror that she remembered how fearfully her slender fortune had dwindled away, and that she had no longer a friend on earth to whom she could appeal for assistance.

On Sydney's professional gains she had long ceased to calculate ; it was Sir Jasper's intercession with her father which had formed the mainstay of her hope, and now Sir Jasper was dead to all human sympathies.

She strained her infant to her heart almost convulsively as these fearful thoughts flashed across her brain. What would become of her boy ? For herself, she could die ; death had no terrors for her ; it would be peace, and rest, and oblivion ; but her noble boy—he was too young, too beautiful, too beloved, not to live long and happily ; and yet to what a fate was he reserved !

Her own trials faded before her fears for him ; and as his soft arms encircled her neck, and his rosy cheek rested against hers, the wife was forgotten in the mother, and she shed tears as holy as an angel might have registered.

It was in this wild burst of grief, to which she had yielded herself up immediately after the departure of Lady Malcolm and her daughter, that she was discovered by her husband on his return from the assize-town where the cause, upon which he had been engaged for Lady Malcolm, had been tried and gained in a manner which had surpassed his most sanguine hopes. Sir F—— T——, upon whose well-known eloquence its success was considered mainly to depend, when in the very act of putting on his gown, had been seized with sudden and violent indisposition : his appearance in court was accordingly impossible ; and it was too late to secure the services of any other leading counsel.

Under these circumstances there was no alternative save to leave the cause entirely in the hands of Mr. Elphinstone, whose familiarity with all its details rendered him the most eligible person to conduct it; and it was consequently fortunate that the industry of the young man in the first place, and his intense anxiety for his friend at the critical moment when he was called upon to incur so heavy a responsibility, produced a degree of excitement that for the time overcame the nervousness to which, on his first appearance in so prominent a position, he would most probably have yielded.

Forgetting his own identity in the important duty before him, he watched the case as it proceeded with a care and tenacity which enabled him to garner up every fact and argument adduced by the opposing counsel; and when, after closely and cleverly cross-questioning the witnesses brought against him, he

at length rose in his turn to reply, the ease and skill with which he analysed and commented upon the speech of his opponent, the lucid manner in which he brought forward and connected his own proofs, the extraordinary grace of his action, the animation of his handsome countenance, and above all, his minute acquaintance with every detail of the case, however trifling and futile in appearance, soon excited universal attention.

The Judge leant forward in his seat, evidently interested both in the cause and the orator; the gentlemen of the bar desisted from their several occupations; squibs were left half-written, and caricatures half-sketched; the audience were silent and absorbed; while even the opposing counsel, who, on finding himself pitted against a mere youth, a legal novice hitherto unknown on the circuit, had performed his duty somewhat less punctiliously than usual, was observed more than once to suffer an ap-



proving gesture to escape him, as the speech proceeded.

But the enthusiastic speaker noticed nothing of all this; his whole heart was in his cause; nor did he imagine when he at last resumed his seat, that in the estimation of most of his professional brethren his cause was already gained. Such, indeed, was the result, and Sydney Elphinstone was both a proud and a happy man when to his surprise and gratification he heard himself complimented by the learned Judge who had presided, and congratulated by the counsel who were seated about him; while, as the climax of his triumph, he had scarcely been an hour at his hotel, when a note from his intended coadjutor was placed in his hand, containing not only the thanks and felicitations of Sir F—— T——, but also the handsome fee with which his own eminent services had been retained.

“The gold which you have so ably won, my

dear Sir, you must be content to wear," said the high-minded lawyer, "and I trust that you will accept with it my very sincere hope that we shall ere long meet again with the same happy result."

His first step towards forensic celebrity was taken, and the ground was firm beneath him.

Such were the circumstances under which the young husband returned to his home, only, as already stated, to find his wife absorbed in grief.

"Ida, my own, my darling Ida;" he exclaimed, as he hurried to her side, and folded her to his heart, forgetting every thing save his love and her sorrow; "what has happened? why do I find you in this miserable state? Speak, darling—do not torture me with suspense."

Mrs. Elphinstone replied, by placing in his hand the letter which announced the death of

Hubert Trevanion, and the imbecility of his father.

Sydney was greatly shocked.

"This is indeed appalling!" he said in an accent of deep feeling; "how I pity your poor father, who will, no doubt, be greatly shocked that all possibility of a reconciliation with his family is now over. Do not think me heartless, Ida, if, however painful as these facts are, it is a consolation to me to find that no misfortune has happened to either yourself or our boy."

"Myself!" echoed his wife, bitterly; "and is it then no misfortune to be alone in the world?"

"Alone, Ida! Did you say alone, with your husband by your side, and your child upon your bosom?"

"But for that child, I should indeed be alone."

Elphinstone withdrew his arm from her waist, and rose from the sofa.

“Have I deserved this, Ida?” he asked reproachfully.

Mrs. Elphinstone was silent.

“Even you, although you have ceased to love me, will perhaps afford me your pity;” he pursued, greatly agitated; “when I tell you that I hastened home, full of hope and joy, with words of kindness and encouragement still sounding in my ears, to offer to you the first fruits of my professional success. The anticipation of your approval, the hope of your sympathy, made every moment of my tedious journey seem an hour until I reached my own door: the transition is a bitter one; but I do not blame you: our affections are beyond our own control, and I must submit to my fate.”

“Do not add cruelty to coldness, Mr. Elphinstone;” said his wife.

“Neither the one nor the other can you ever experience at my hands, Ida. I have loved you


as woman is seldom loved ; I would sacrifice my life to ensure your happiness ; but you wilfully misjudge me. How can I regain the affection which was once mine ? Only become what you were during the first months of our marriage—tender, generous, and confiding ; only let me once more be convinced that I have not forfeited your love ; that our sad and unaccountable estrangement is at an end ; and I shall consider no effort too great which may enable me to feel that you are again the Ida of former days.”

“ Would that it indeed were in my power ;” was the gloomy reply ; “ but we cannot deceive ourselves, Sydney ; we are both changed.—Like yourself, I utter no reproach ; I only yearn for a renewal of the illusion which is unhappily dissipated for ever.”

“ And wherefore ? If we are only true to ourselves and to each other, what more can we require for happiness ?”

“Do not urge me;” said Ida, with a fresh burst of tears; “I am unhinged, and sick at heart.”

“In that at least we sympathise;” retorted her husband, as he turned away, unable to endure the sight of a grief which he could neither comprehend nor console; that his wife was suffering most acutely he could not doubt; and such was in fact the case, for jealousy is an intermittent fever which ‘has,’ says a celebrated French author, ‘its paroxysms and its hours of lassitude; no patient could long endure the violence of the ague-fits which shake, chill, and agitate their victim with an universal shiver; no heart is strong enough to sustain the tension of the anger which absorbs the whole being.’ And thus it was with Ida; the doubts and fears in which she had so recently indulged had prostrated her powers; and now, as she looked upon the clear frank eye and proud brow of her husband, a new trouble grew upon



her ; Could it indeed be that she had wronged him ?

She began to doubt herself ; and that doubt was torture ; for, if she had done so, how mean, how despicable, must she not appear in his eyes ? He might profess to love her still, but *would* he do so when she had wounded him alike in his heart and in his honour ?

She rose suddenly from her seat, and laying her child upon the cushions of the sofa, she moved a few steps towards her husband with the intention of once more throwing herself at his feet, and entreating him to pardon her ; but just as she approached, unconscious of her purpose, he took his hat from the table, and merely saying : “I can no longer delay apprizing Lady Malcolm of the success of her cause, which I was anxious to communicate personally”—he turned, and left the room.

Once more the angel of peace folded its wings, and bowed its radiant head.

“No, I have not wronged him!” was the exclamation of Ida, as she swept back her disordered hair, and clasped her hands in passionate emotion: “he *dare* not remain to justify himself; and worse, far worse, before he has been an hour in his home—the home of his wife and child—he finds a ready excuse for hastening to reap the reward of his exertions in *her* smiles.

“Fool that I was to doubt! when he takes so little pains to conceal his falsehood, why should I torture myself by self-accusings as idle as the are ill-timed? Should I not blush at the cowardly impulse which would have carried me to his feet, to be again cajoled, and again deceived?

“Father! you are revenged. Grievously have I sinned, but grievously also do I suffer. You would have made me great; and could you only know the abject thing I am, you would forego all further vengeance—loveless,



friendless, and almost homeless, your proud heiress still hangs upon the smile of a man whom her love has wearied—still clings to him, even amid her wrongs.”

The demon once more triumphed. Reason was drowned beneath the waves of passion.

## CHAPTER X.

## A LAST HOPE.

HIS unfortunate reception by his wife, after his professional triumph, had wounded Elphinstone to the heart ; and, consequently, at the very moment when he should have been hopeful and buoyant he became depressed and spiritless.

Why, he asked himself, should he toil, when she whose love would have made his labour light had not only ceased to interest herself in his efforts, but had even disdained to utter a single comment on his success ?

To what a different result he had once looked forward ! How fondly and confidingly had Ida, on former days, listened to the air-built hopes which at that period he had so little power to realise ; while now, when each and all were about to become real and tangible, she had withdrawn from him alike her sympathy and her encouragement.

Vain were all the congratulations poured on him by his friends, and the laudatory comments of the public press ; vain were even the offers of professional employment pressed upon him, to arouse him from the settled gloom into which he had fallen ; and although he pursued his legal duties with care and conscientiousness, his enthusiasm was at an end ; and few could now recognise in the calm and unimpressed Sydney Elphinstone, the brilliant and sparkling orator by whose eloquence they had so recently been startled and surprised.

His crushed heart was no longer in his task ;

it was buried beneath the ashes of his loveless home. Young and sanguine, he had never foreseen the possibility of a spirit-void like this; and the moral desolation withered him.

Had he possessed more strength of character, he might have replaced affection by ambition, but his nature was too yielding, and too dependent upon external support, to lead him to strive for the mere excitement of the struggle, when no helping hand was stretched forth to sustain him.

It is true that the tearful gratitude of Lady Malcolm and her daughter, and the reflection that Edith was at length in secure possession of the handsome inheritance of which she had been in danger of seeing herself defrauded, and henceforward protected from all danger of pecuniary embarrassment, afforded him deep and genuine gratification; but even this consciousness was a very inadequate compensation for the home-happiness that he had lost;

while amid his present wretchedness there awoke within him a dread that Ida, the bright and beloved being whose love had once made his world, might one day urge him beyond his patience, should she continue to indulge in the baseless suspicions and unjust accusations by which she had already tortured him.

“ But no, no ;” he murmured sadly to himself ; “ come what may, I must be guilty of no such cowardice ; for me, she abandoned rank, and wealth, and station, incurred the anger of her implacable father, and resigned herself to comparative poverty ; she is the wife of my bosom, and the mother of my child.

“ So long as she has no home save mine to shelter her ; no heart save mine to bleed for her, I must bear all the misery which she may see fit to inflict upon me. I were less than man, were I to resent even the most cruel of her caprices ; but should it one day chance

that her father should relent, then indeed, it would become my duty to assert myself; to prove to her that I am not the abject thing she thinks me.

“Yes, even although in wringing her heart I should crush my own for ever, we should then have no alternative save to part. She has ceased to love me; obscurity and privation have done their work; and she would find consolation in the gaud and glitter which render the contrast of her present existence so bitter to her.

“Poor Ida! why did I vainly imagine that my love would compensate for all? The fault was mine; and I must expiate it as I best may.”

One word of kindness, one look of tenderness from his wife at this period, would have restored Elphinstone to her, as fond and as indulgent as ever; but the word was not uttered, the look was not vouchsafed.

Ida had, after the interview which we have described, subsided into a cold and listless serenity, which admitted of no reproach, and silenced all questioning. To the well-being of her boy she was ever keenly alive, but she manifested no interest on any other subject; Sydney came and went as he listed without either inquiry or comment; she was calmly courteous when he was near her, but seemed totally careless of his absence; it was, in short, a domestic illustration of the German tale, of the dead and the living bodies linked together, and at length, unable longer to endure the joyless existence to which he was condemned, Elphinstone, in a moment of ungovernable wretchedness, poured out all his sorrow into the sympathising bosom of Lady Malcolm, and entreated her good offices with Ida.

Hitherto he had, in so far as he was enabled to do so, locked the secret of his home-trials

within his own breast, but they had gradually become too heavy to be borne alone ; and as, with blanched cheeks and quivering lips, he described the daily torture to which he was subjected to the amiable woman who loved him as a son, her heart sunk within her.

True to his implied promise to his wife, Elphinstone forbore, even in his agitation, to hint at her unworthy suspicions. He well knew that Lady Malcolm would never have forgiven the insult offered to her child ; and thus his listener could only recur to her original idea that Ida was causing the unhappiness of both, by a weak jealousy of some former object of her husband's affection.

“ You grieve me more than I can express, Sydney ;” she said, when his sad confession was made ; “ but you must remember that, painful as your present trial cannot fail to be to you, there is never jealousy without love. Mrs. Elphinston may probably have been told



that she was not the first possessor of your heart—that you had loved before you became the slave of her own beauty—and, however we may lament that she should yield to the weakness of repining at so common a circumstance, still, as her error is solely caused by her affection, it should meet with indulgence from you.”

“But I swear to you, my dear Lady Malcolm, that I never loved any woman but herself. Consider what my age was when I married! Was it probable that at twenty I should offer her an exhausted heart?”

“Age, my dear boy, has little to do with passion. Before you utter any further disclaimers, try to recal the past, and to remember if there be not some name which has, at one period or other, been linked with your own.”

“Never. The thing is impossible.”

“And yet, if I mistake not, I have myself

heard rumours of an attachment between Lady Mary Maitland and Mr. Sidney Elphinstone?"

"How dare people so trifle with the name of a woman!" exclaimed her companion indignantly. "Lady Mary never gave me the most remote reason to suppose that she regarded me with the slightest favour; while, for myself, I looked upon her simply as a beautiful and unaffected girl, of whom I should have been proud as a sister, but never should have chosen as a wife."

"Nevertheless, as the report reached me, it may also have reached Mrs. Elphinstone."

"I am persuaded that Ida never even heard the name of Lady Mary Maitland."

"Of that fact you cannot be sure, my dear boy; and I still adhere to my opinion. That you have given your wife the slightest cause of uneasiness *since* your marriage, I am myself in a position to deny. Did I not make Mrs. Elphinstone's acquaintance while still a bride?"

Do I not know that up to the present day you have frequented no house but my own? that the hours which must have been devoted to a flirtation of any kind, had you been unprincipled enough to indulge in so reprehensible an amusement, have been consecrated to the interests of Edith and myself?"

Elphinstone involuntarily shrank under her frank and unsuspecting gaze.

"Thus then;" she pursued; "it can only be as I have stated; and you would do well to allude to the subject; not as suspecting the cause of her present disquiet, for that could, in either case, only wound her feelings; but speak of Lady Mary openly and unaffectedly as a former acquaintance, even as a friend, if you will; and conclude by informing your wife that the young lady is about to bestow her hand upon the Marquis of Brentwood, a fact of which I have been assured."

"Such a proceeding would avail me no-

thing;" said Elphinstone gloomily; "Ida has never even dreamed of Lady Mary."

"You astonish me, Sydney, by your persistence in this opinion; I had hoped and believed that I had discovered, and could have struck at, the root of the evil. But doubtlessly I have wronged your wife, by attributing to her so despicable a weakness as jealousy."

"I fear not."

"My dear boy, you are inexplicable, but I have no right to ask of you a greater amount of confidence than you are willing to repose in me. All, therefore, that I can now do, is to inquire how I may be of service to you?"

"I will tell you, my kind friend;" was the agitated reply; "on you rests my only hope. See my poor self-deluded Ida; reason with her; convince her of my unchanged and unchangeable affection; describe to her the misery which she is daily and hourly inflicting

on me; ask her only to hear my justification before she condemns me; urge her to hear you in the name of her boy—she still loves him! And, above all, bear with her waywardness, should she give utterance to anything which may wound you—look upon her rather as one suffering from vital disease than—”

“Enough, Sydney, enough—I will obey your bidding, my dear boy, for your dead mother’s sake; although I am quite aware that the part, which I am about to play, is, at best, an invidious one; at, any sacrifice of my own feelings, however, I will strive to restore peace between you, for your present existence is a sad waste of life, and must sooner or later become intolerable to both parties. Perhaps, Mrs. Elphinstone will be more frank than yourself; should it happily prove so, I am sanguine as to the results of my interference.”

The excited young man seized the kind

hand which was extended to him, and raised it to his lips.

“And you will bear with her, even should she——”

“Yes,” interposed Lady Malcolm, with an encouraging smile; “even should she tell me, as with justice she may, that I have exceeded the privilege of a friend, by presuming to intrude my advice unasked; so be of good cheer, Sydney; I will call upon Mrs. Elphinstone early to-morrow; and I trust that before I leave her, I shall see her weeping out in your arms the happy tears of renewed confidence and affection. And now, in return for my concession, go home, and try my experiment regarding Lady Mary Maitland. I am not yet convinced, and shall be by no means surprised if on arriving at your house, I find my own interference altogether unnecessary.”

The young man strove to return her parting

smile, but it was with a sad foreboding of the failure of Lady Malcolm's attempt that he turned his steps homeward.

## CHAPTER X.

## THE WIFE AND THE FRIEND.

IRKSOME as Mr. Trevanion had considered his position while under the roof of his uncle, it became tenfold more so when he was again established in his own house. The peculiar circumstances of the last month had unsettled his mind for business; while the daily increasing inanity of his wife, and the selfish condescension of Lady Mary Brooklands, alike irritated him. Mrs. Trevanion, like most weak people, had a horror of mourning, and declared



that her health was injured by the gloom of everything about her.

“I should not have cared, you know, Lady Mary ;” she whined ; “if I had been called upon to wear this odious silk and crape for Mr. Trevanion, or Ida, or even for yourself ; because then it would have been only right and proper ; but to do it for a person I never saw in my life is a great deal too bad ; just as Mademoiselle Laura had sent me three loves of caps that are now sheer waste. And the servants, too ; I declare they all look like people just returned from a funeral ; and as for Mr. Trevanion, it is really shocking to see how little he cares how things go on now at home.”

“Mr. Trevanion has a great responsibility pressing upon him, my dear Madam ; and cannot, consequently, be expected to interest himself so much as formerly in the details of his establishment ; which, moreover, he does

me the honour to think that I can regulate with tolerable efficiency," was the sententious reply.

"I wish that poor Ida had never left us;" resumed the lady of the mansion, after a brief silence; "there was something like life in the house while she was here—and I had some one to love me then—but now, I might as well be in my grave."

An equivocal smile played for an instant about the mouth of her companion, but it did not linger.

"Doubtlessly, we all miss Mrs. Elphinstone," she said; "but surely, you at least have no just cause of complaint. Mr. Trevanion is a most generous husband."

"Generous!" echoed the poor lady, with a burst of very unusual indignation; "I am sure I cannot think what meaning you attach to such a word. Do you imply that I am clothed, and fed, and lodged like a gentle-

woman? I have a right to be so, for my fortune was the foundation of my husband's. But what am I to become in my own house? Do you suppose that because I bear with the indignity in silence, I do not feel the insult of seeing a stranger take my place, and perform my duties?"

"My dear Mrs. Trevanion, you amaze me!" exclaimed Lady Mary, alarmed by this sudden and unexpected self-assertion on the part of her hitherto supine and listless companion; "In your delicate state of health, would it be kind, would it be prudent, to subject you to so great a fatigue as the superintendence of an extensive establishment necessarily involves? You surely cannot be serious in thus misinterpreting the considerate kindness of Mr. Trevanion?"

"It would be no fatigue to reply if I were occasionally consulted on the arrangements of my household;" said the irritated woman, to

whom anger had lent a temporary energy ; “but if he did not see me from day to day, I might easily imagine that Mr. Trevanion had forgotten my existence. Surely, when my daughter was gone, I had a right to be the mistress of my own house.”

“Mrs. Trevanion ;” said Lady Mary, looking up from her worsted-work with an air of offended virtue ; “I cannot pretend to misunderstand your inference. You are jealous of my position in the family. You shall no longer have cause to be so. I will immediately apprise Mr. Trevanion of your sentiments, and request his consent to resign a post which has for years been both delicate and difficult. He will be delighted, I do not doubt, to find that you consider yourself equal to the exertion of taking my place.”

“I am sure that I never asked you to leave us ;” was her terrified reply ; “of course you will tell Mr. Trevanion what you please, and

you well know what he will answer. I have no friend to take *my* part; no child to care for *me*, and so I must submit; but if you think that I do not feel, you are both mistaken."

Lady Mary instantly saw her advantage, and pursued it.

"I had flattered myself;" she said haughtily; "that you regarded *me* as a friend, but I find that I am deceived; and that after having devoted long and weary years to the interests of yourself and your daughter, I am still considered as a stranger. Under such circumstances, Mrs. Trevanion, I can, of course, no longer remain a guest in your house."

"You were very kind to Ida, I know," conceded her companion sullenly.

"And of what have you yourself to complain?" was the harsh inquiry; "before we part, I should desire to ascertain upon what grounds you assume the right to censure me.

Mr. Trevanion, conscious that neither his connexions nor your own could introduce your daughter into the society in which he wished her to move, solicited my assistance, which I granted as frankly as it was asked. I filled your house with the *élite* of the fashionable world ; I did for Ida what neither her money nor her beauty *could* have done ; I enabled her to take her place among them. That she did not profit by my exertions in her behalf was assuredly no fault of mine."

"You introduced your nephew to her," exclaimed Mrs. Trevanion with a last flash of expiring spirit.

"I presented many to her besides my nephew ;" was the reply of Lady Mary, as a conscious flush rose to her cheek ; "but I never counselled her to marry him. On the contrary, I represented to her the folly and rashness of such a choice. Had she been my own daughter I could not have advised her

more disinterestedly. But it is of yourself that I would speak rather than of your daughter. Do *you* not also owe many hours of gratification to my good offices? Have you not seen yourself surrounded by some of the greatest and noblest in the land? And have you forgotten to whom you were indebted for such a privilege? Your husband has a better memory, and to him I shall have no cause to appeal."

"Ah, those were happy days!" murmured out the broken-spirited woman, once more crushed beneath the well-acted indignation of her haughty companion, and burying herself still deeper amid her cushions; "those were happy days!"

"I am rejoiced to find that you at least admit that fact;" pursued this relentless persecutor; "as it proves that you have little cause of complaint. Those days might have been renewed, had the same good understand-

ing continued to exist between us; but that will be impossible when I have left you. *My* friends will, as a natural consequence, resent the affront which has been offered to me; nor will it be in my power to prevent it."

"I am sure that it was not my intention to offend you;" sobbed out Mrs. Trevanion, whose unaccustomed excitement had terminated in tears; "You know, my dear Lady Mary, that I dare not do so, even if I wished it. Do not leave me alone with my husband: it is too late, too late—once, perhaps, I might have resented his harshness, but that time has gone by. I only wished—I only thought,—that I might have been treated with more kindness, more consideration; that I might at least have had a voice in what concerned myself; but I will never indulge in such a hope again."

"And you will do well;" said her companion, as she glanced with contempt upon the



weak woman whose domestic wrongs should rather have excited her sympathy; "You have not to learn to-day the peculiar disposition of Mr. Trevanion; he is proud, very proud; and should he find himself coldly treated by those who have hitherto professed to be his friends, he would bitterly resent the insult. Should I withdraw myself from his house, this would undoubtedly be the case, nor could I conceal from him that a puerile love of power on your own part had led to the annoyance.

"Decide, therefore, in how far you feel yourself able to resist his displeasure. If I go, it is because you have desired it; if I remain, it can and shall only be at your express request. That you have deeply wounded me you must both see and feel, but for your own sake I will consent to pardon the affront, if by so doing you believe that I may avert from you the resentment of your husband."

“Oh, no, no; don’t talk of leaving us;” gasped out her victim; “whatever I may feel, whatever I may suffer, I will never offend you again even by a word, my dear Lady Mary.”

“I will trust to that assurance; and now, listen to me a moment longer, Mrs. Trevanion. You know that your nephew is dead, and that his father will, in all probability, soon follow him to the grave. Now I appeal to your own good sense; if even here, in your Richmond Villa, you are unequal to the exigencies of your position, how could you hope to acquit yourself of the more complicated and onerous duties which would await you at Trevanion Hall? And besides;” she added with a smile full of blandishment and meaning; “as *Lady* Trevanion, you will have ample occupation in sustaining your rank, and receiving your guests. By the bye, I find that the family diamonds are superb; and as Ida is unfortunately *hors de-*

*combat*, at least for the present, you will enjoy undisputed possession of these far-famed jewels. Is it then reasonable that you should indulge in idle repinings at imaginary wrongs when so brilliant a destiny awaits you?"

Weak and vain, however, as the poor mother was, there was yet something in the words of her companion which jarred upon her feelings. She could not exult in any triumph which was obtained at the cost of her only child; and even the vision evoked by the artful Lady Mary lost its charm, as she remembered how beautiful her banished *Ida* would have looked in the diamonds which were, as she was assured, to be her own.

Little, however, did Lady Mary Brooklands care to speculate upon the hidden feelings of a mother's heart. She had accomplished her purpose; she had silenced the justifiable murmurs of the ill-used wife; she had crushed the germ of indignation in the spirit of the wo-

man; she had, as she trusted, aroused her egotism, and dazzled her vanity; and, better still, she had secured herself against every chance of expulsion from a home, in which without either outlay or responsibility, she lived a life of luxury and ease which formed a delicious contrast to the existence of privation and expedients to which she must have been reduced, if once more compelled to subsist upon her very insufficient jointure.

The conviction of her present and future security acted like magic on the mood and manner of the noble matron; she listened to the puerilities of her companion with unfailing patience; affected to sympathise in all her murmurs—for despite her promises, poor Mrs. Trevanion's existence was one long murmur, which appeared to possess for her a species of negative enjoyment; and, finally, she rose from her worsted work to select from a box of books, just received from Churton's, 'a charm-

ing new novel,' which she recommended to her perusal.

No wonder that when Lady Mary considerably withdrew in order that she might enjoy it undisturbed, the guileless dupe felt self-convicted of injustice and want of courtesy towards the able tactitian who had so skilfully terminated an interview, which, from the instant that her own point was gained, had alike wearied and disgusted her.

In ten minutes more the family friend was closeted in the library with the master of the house.

## CHAPTER XII.

## GREEK MEETS GREEK.

As had been constantly the case since his return to town, Mr. Trevanion was surrounded by papers and accounts, all relating to the affairs of his family, which now appeared to absorb the whole of his attention ; for, although his first impulse had been one which did him honour, it must not be denied that after-reflection had induced him to regard himself if not actually as an ill-used, at least as a very unfortunate, individual.

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Had Sir Jasper borne the shock of his son's death, as he had borne that of his daughter's desertion, and been still competent to fulfil the duties of his station, it is probable that his nephew would have awaited with patience and equanimity the period when he should himself become the representative of the family honours ; but when he remembered that, the baronet was, to all intents and purposes, dead to the world, though he might possibly continue for years to live on in the same imbecile and powerless condition, a feeling of irritation took possession of him which he made little or no effort to repress.

Every detail connected with the estate assumed, in his eyes, a separate importance, far greater than it really merited ; the value of the ancient timber which rendered the extensive park the most picturesque and stately in the county, was calculated again and again ; the massive plate, which had been the accumula-

tion of centuries, and the Indian accessions by which it had been increased through the marriage of Sir Jasper with the nabob's widow, underwent a similar process ; while not the least interesting subject of his ruminations was the banker's book, with its careful record of the heavy sums saved annually by the baronet, and destined to the establishment of his son. .

Hitherto, Mr. Trevanion had looked upon money rather as a means than an end ; though he had laboured assiduously for wealth, he had regarded it rather as a slave than as a master ; he had valued the pomp, the luxury, and the consideration which it secured to him, and not the gold for its own sake ; nay, throughout the whole of his career until the marriage of Ida, he had coveted its increase rather for her sake than for his own ; and all his yearnings had been awakened by the sole ambition of achieving greatness without the aid of those who had despised him in his poverty.



Now, however, when the 'bloody hand' appeared to be almost within his grasp, it was no longer the chief object of attraction, and had he been a needy man with whom the world had dealt grudgingly, he might well have been pardoned for such a feeling; while, as it was, it seemed suddenly to have changed his whole nature.

He had no sooner ascertained the enormous sum produced by his own already colossal wealth, when united to that of which he must necessarily become the owner on the demise of the baronet, than he suddenly forgot his ambition in his avarice. He even regretted the profuse expenditure in which he had for so many years indulged, as he reflected that, having failed in his darling project of securing a noble son-in-law, so much more would have been added to the heap; and there were moments when he almost resolved to curtail his establishment, in order to reduce the further

inroads which it compelled him to make upon his treasured capital.

Never had the proud merchant been so restless and so ill at ease. Trevanion Hall on the one hand, and the counting-house in the city on the other—his two mines of wealth—appeared to him so discordant and so incompatible that they almost, each in its turn, fretted him to fever.

He was now, actually if not legally, the head of his house; but while the old man lived, he must continue to be Mr. Trevanion, the merchant. His commercial affairs progressed as usual, but there was, nevertheless, a moral interregnum in his existence, during which he could not mentally define his real position.

To a haughty spirit like his the feeling that such was the case amounted to actual suffering; and at times he would have been thankful, had intelligence reached him that his uncle

had been restored to the possession of his faculties, for then he could at least have reconciled himself to pursue the career which had already raised him to opulence and honour; but, situated as he now was, it had become distasteful to him, while he had no equivalent to replace either its excitement or its advantages.

Haughty and stern as ever, he had less self-command; and where he would formerly have spurned support, he now yearned to secure it. He was no longer young; no longer sanguine; he could not look beyond the present hour without disturbing himself.

Nothing had come to pass as he had foreshadowed it. The nephew, whose very name had been obnoxious to him because he stood in the way of his own greatness, was in his grave; the daughter upon whom he had leaned with confidence as the sure agent of his ambition had failed him; the relative whom he

sought to humble was beyond the reach of wordly mortification ; and more bitter than all else, he must consent to forego his resentment, and to acknowledge the child of a penniless son-in-law as his heir, or be condemned to the exasperating consciousness that, resist as he might, he had no power to prevent that child from succeeding him as the heir of the Trevanions.

He had arrived at this phase of his reverie when Lady Mary Brooklands entered the library.

“Are you engaged, Mr. Trevanion?” she asked in her blindest tone ; “if so, I will take some future opportunity of communicating what I have to say.”

“My engagements at present,” was the equally bland reply ; “are by no means pressing ;” and Mr. Trevanion, with his usual ceremonious politeness, rose from his seat to advance a chair for his visitor.

As he resumed his own, his eye fell on the

formidable array of figures in which he had that morning inscribed his possessions *in esse* and *posse*; and it was with increased stateliness that he prepared to grant the audience solicited by his noble inmate.

Lady Mary was a peer's daughter, true; but she was as poor as she was proud; while he had wherewithal to buy up a score of peerages, should they come into the market. The time had passed when she was absolutely essential to him, but he well knew that he was as necessary to her as ever. He had purchased her services, and could still pay their price; there was no feeling of obligation on either side; while constant association had enabled them to comprehend each other perfectly.

Lady Mary inwardly sneered at the man of money who aspired at greatness; while the merchant, on his side, despised the great lady who sacrificed her dignity to her interests.

Still, nothing could exceed the urbanity and good breeding with which both played their part in the domestic drama. If there was neither confidence, friendship, nor regard between them, there was the strong tie of mutual necessity. Each was essential to the other, and each was conscious that such was the case.

Thus, even when Mr. Trevanion, with a keenness of perception rendered still more acute by distrust—for, from the moment Ida became the wife of Sydney Elphinstone, he *had* distrusted Lady Mary—perceived, or fancied he perceived, that the tortuous talent of the titled widow was about to be exhibited in some new and skilful manœuvre, not a look or a gesture was ever suffered to betray such a suspicion; nor did he, when he occasionally contrived, with apparent unconsciousness, to baffle her endeavour, permit her to imagine that he was aware of having done so.

Nevertheless, he was constantly upon his guard against a surprise; and it was, consequently, with a misgiving of some fresh design upon his purse or his pride that he, on the present occasion, assumed an attitude of profound and earnest attention.

Nor was he far wrong in his anticipations, for after having so cleverly protested against the indignant interference of the wife, the astute matron resolved to render her position equally secure with the husband.

Skilfully as she had striven to ascertain the intentions of Mr. Trevanion, on his accession to the baronetcy, she had been unable to effect her purpose. Had she succeeded in inducing him to confide to her his decision regarding his daughter, her own future fate would have been clearly mapped out before her; for should he resolve to recal his long-banished child, now a wife and a mother, Mrs. Elphinstone must necessarily do the honours of Trevanion

Hall, and, with her high spirit, would brook no interference from herself; in which case, she must either forego the well-appreciated advantages of her present home, or consent to subside into insignificance; whereas, should the offended father persevere in his resentment, her own reign was secured.

It was to satisfy herself of this important point that she now intruded on the solitude of the merchant, but she was by far too able a tactitian to put the question directly.

“My reason for wishing to see you at this particular moment, Mr. Trevanion;” she commenced; “was to inform you that I have just had a somewhat important conversation with your wife. As it is extremely probable that your uncle, Sir Jasper, cannot long survive, and as his death will occasion great and extensive alterations in your domestic arrangements, I thought it desirable to ascertain the wishes and



intentions of Mrs. Trevanion, when the event should occur——”

“A work of supererogation, Madam, which could tend to no result.”

“Perhaps so ; but, aware as I am of the peculiar constitution of Mrs. Trevanion’s mind, I thought it very possible that when once she had become Lady Trevanion, she would consider herself aggrieved should I continue to exercise the same authority under your roof as you have hitherto delegated to me ; and, therefore, I resolved to have a clear and perfect understanding with herself upon the subject.”

“And did you succeed ?” enquired her listener, with a sneer.

“Perfectly.”

“Then, my Lady Mary, you have worked a miracle which throughout the whole of my married life, *I* have been unable to accomplish.”

“I was prepared;” pursued his companion ; “should my poor friend evince the slightest desire to assume her duties as mistress of the house in her new home, to abdicate my throne at once ; and, with that view, I had already written to my cousin, the Dowager-Duchess of Clanmore, who is a widow like myself, to propose that we should combine our forces, and establish a joint household ”

“And what did her grace reply?” enquired the merchant, with most alarming composure.

“I am still awaiting her answer ;” said the discomfited Lady Mary, striving to conceal her uneasiness ; “ but there can be little doubt as to its purport, since she made the same request to me before I became your guest.”

“ That arrangement then is still in abeyance ; but you will perhaps be kind enough to acquaint me how Mrs. Trevanion received your proposition.”

“ She refused to hear of my leaving her—

she even shed tears,—and I assure you, my dear Mr. Trevanion, that I bitterly reproached myself for having occasionally imagined that she misinterpreted my feelings and intentions.”

“Do not make yourself uneasy on the subject, Lady Mary ; Mrs. Trevanion’s imaginary annoyances may always be removed by a new dress or a new novel. For once, however, she acted with common sense ; but you must pardon me if I venture to remark that it would have been more in accordance with your usual good judgment, had you consulted me rather than my wife. However, I have no doubt that you were impelled by a sense of delicacy to act as you did ; and you are, at all events, a free agent. Thus, then, I am to understand, that, before you decide upon your future plans, you will await the reply of your cousin the duchess.”

“Why, not, precisely—” commenced the

noble matron, with an eagerness which she immediately endeavoured to restrain; "of course, so far as my residence with her is concerned, I shall be compelled to do so; but I am half inclined to visit Scotland under any circumstances."

"I had flattered myself that you would have felt some curiosity to see my ancestral home," remarked Mr. Trevanion, with even more than his usual stateliness; "and, indeed, I looked forward to the advantage of your good taste and judgment in the alterations and improvements which I shall find it necessary to make there. My uncle has, since the death of his wife, lived a very retired life, and suffered the hall to remain in precisely the same state in which I remember it in my boyhood; I discovered no symptom of decided neglect or decay on my late visit, certainly; but still much is required to render it what I should desire."

“Both the Hall and the adjacent estate have great capabilities, very great capabilities, and I have resolved, when they once come into my possession, to develop them to their utmost extent. Sir Jasper, as I soon ascertained, had been anxious rather to save money than to spend it; and he was right. He had a son to inherit the property; I am differently situated; and, moreover, while he was known to all the county, I shall enter it as a stranger, and must consequently be cautious not to allow the local dignity of the family to suffer in my hands.

“This place is, as you are aware, Mrs. Trevanion’s jointure-house, and enough, more than enough, has already been expended upon it; indeed, to be candid with you, I almost repent that I have been tempted to do so much. However, when I establish myself at the Hall, it will probably let more advantageously in consequence than it might otherwise have done.

As to the house in town, for the present at least, it will answer every purpose, as I shall decidedly reside in the country until I have completed all my plans."

Lady Mary bowed and smiled, and tacitly signified her acquiescence in the propriety of these somewhat premature projects ; but still, as she could not conceal from herself, she was no nearer her own point than ever.

"Mrs. Trevanion appears to be most anxious that you should consent to a reconciliation with your daughter at this particular crisis," she hazarded, in order to arrive at some conclusion.

"Mrs. Trevanion is very good ; and she must surely have become aware long ere this, that, as I can place no reliance on her judgment on any serious emergency, I cannot be expected to suffer her wants or wishes to control me in any way. 'This particular crisis' offers no reason that I can perceive, for a

precipitate measure of the sort. Mrs. Sydney Elphinstone quitted my roof at her own good pleasure, but she must return to it only at mine; and when, if ever, I may decide on again receiving her, is entirely a matter for my own consideration."

"Yet surely;" remarked the lady, making another desperate plunge to clutch the truth which lay deep beneath the waves of the merchant's resolute reserve; "it will be a most unpleasant thing for you to feel that your heir is a stranger to you! Of course, Ida must be naturally anxious that her boy should be reared and educated in such a manner as you would approve."

"I really do not see why Mrs. Elphinstone should be more punctilious with regard to her son's conduct than her own. On the contrary, she is, no doubt, perfectly aware that he will ultimately be more independent of my displeasure than she could ever be; and I feel no

present inclination to interfere with her peculiar system of education."

"But you cannot, nevertheless, shut your eyes to the fact, my good Sir, that your daughter does not possess the means necessary to carry out any such system in an efficient manner; and surely—"

"You are a zealous friend, Lady Mary, and your niece will, beyond all doubt, be grateful for your good offices; but still, it appears to me, that you over-rate the privations to which she has thought proper to expose herself. You should remember that she possesses an income of four hundred a year, (about as much as she expended upon her dress before her marriage) and that Mr. Sydney Elphinstone is declared to be a very rising young man; fame brings profit, my dear Madam, in every profession; and thus you see that you alarm yourself unnecessarily, and that the young gentleman, regarding whose future career you express so



very flattering an anxiety will need no patronage of mine."

"Still, as the heir to the Trevanion estates——"

"I yet stand in his way;" said the merchant drily; "and may probably do so for many years to come; added to which, although Sir Jasper is *hors de combat* in all matters of business, he is nevertheless still alive; and for any reason which I can see to the contrary, now that his mind can no longer act upon his physical health, he may survive for twenty years to come."

"You cannot be serious, Mr. Trevanion."

"I am perfectly so."

"I regret to hear it, as, according to my own view of the case, you would be wise in so ordering your arrangements as to be prepared at any moment to supply his place."

"I flatter myself, Lady Mary, that I should have been quite competent to do so at an

hour's warning, at any period during the last thirty years. But, my dear madam, I have myself known invalids in his condition outlive their natural heirs; and who shall say that my uncle may not augment the number."

His listener was fairly baffled, but, indignant at the idea of defeat, she returned once more to the charge.

"I am to understand, then, Mr. Trevanion, that, in the remote contingency of Sir Jasper's death, you are anxious that I should accompany the family to Trevanion Hall?"

"Certainly, my dear Lady Mary. Can you doubt that you will ever be a welcome guest beneath my roof?"

"I hope not;" said the lady, beginning to chafe under the consciousness that she was checkmated at every move; "but my inquiry embraces a wider scope than you appear inclined to concede to it. As I have already stated, I have been entreated, even with tears,

by Mrs. Trevanion, not to abandon her to the heavy and irksome responsibilities which must devolve upon the mistress of such an establishment as that which you contemplate in —— shire.

“Of course——” she pursued with a significant smile; “I have not to learn to-day that she can make no independent arrangement of so serious a nature without your sanction; and it is consequently to you that I appeal before I conclude my own plans.”

“I trust, my dear Madam, that you have not wearied of my house; I should indeed be sorry to find that such were the case.”

“No, no; do not mistake me. The fact is, that, as I take a totally different view of the baronet’s malady from yourself, I look daily for news of his death; and, since you compel me to speak frankly, I should like to be informed whether, when it has taken place, you have any intention of recalling your daughter,

and establishing her at the head of your household ; as, in the event of such an arrangement, I must of course decline a further residence beneath your roof. Ida is no longer a mere girl, and she would naturally——”

“ When I have given Mrs. Sydney Elphinstone a right to dictate her own terms, I shall be prepared to consider them ;” was the imperturbable reply. “ At present I am content to wait the demise of my uncle before I decide on my after-plans. Meanwhile, I feel much indebted to you, my dear Lady Mary, for the consideration which you have shown to the wishes of Mrs. Trevanion. No doubt she is appalled by the prospect before her ; she would be equally so by a far less important event ; and I shall feel still further obliged, if you will tranquillise her mind upon the subject, and assure her from me that, in any and every case, I shall be careful that she is not exposed to any extra care or exertion. I

trouble you with this mission, because, after the interest which you have so kindly evinced in her very unnecessary anxiety, I feel satisfied that you will derive gratification from performing so friendly an office."

Lady Mary Brooklands rose ; she could endure no more ; the calm self-possession of her companion made the blood tingle in her veins ; but she was one of those wary individuals who live not only *in* the world, but *on* it ; she could not afford to be true to herself ; and, accordingly, she repressed the haughty rejoinder which trembled upon her lips ; and, after a few inconsequent remarks, left the library, as ignorant of the real intentions of its master as when she had entered it.

Nevertheless, when she once more found herself alone in her own pretty morning-room, with its costly store of rare china, buhl, marqueterie, and bronze, she soon succeeded in convincing herself that the designs of Mr.

Trevanion were more transparent than he imagined ; and that it behoved her to be careful of her own interests.

“ Had he resolved”—thus she mentally argued—“ to exclude Ida from her home during his life-time, he would have evinced more anxiety to prevent me from carrying out my assumed arrangement with the Duchess of Clanmore ; as the idea of his placing at the head of his house in ——shire a woman of whom he is ashamed even here, is preposterous. Crafty as he has been, he has not succeeded in deceiving me ; and now my only chance of averting the mortifying change of fortune by which I am threatened, exists in an immediate reconciliation with Ida. How do I regret that, in obedience to her father’s request, I did not reply to the letters which she addressed to me after her marriage ! However, *le passé est passé*, and I must endeavour to retrieve my fault. I will write to her at once.”

And, seating herself at the antique *secretaire*, inlaid with mother-of-pearl and malachite, which occupied the bay of the window, twenty minutes had not elapsed before she had crossed the first page of her paper with expressions of affection, regret, and remorse, as intense as though she had been the cause of Mrs. Elphinstone's disgrace, and had been plotting to rob her son of his birthright.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## AN EXPLANATION.

IN compliance with the advice of Lady Malcolm, Elphinstone, on his return home, affecting to be blind to the coldness and indifference of his wife, resolutely commenced a conversation, to which she contributed nothing beyond an occasional monosyllable; nor could even his account of the trial, and the formidable ordeal through which he had so successfully passed, elicit from her any demonstration of excitement or gratified pride.



Nevertheless, he persisted in his ungracious task, until her suppressed emotion became too powerful for concealment, and the heart of Sydney began to swell with hope.

“ You do feel for me, and with me, Ida,” he said tenderly, as she turned away to hide the tears which had forced their way from her downcast eyes ; “ I am sure you do, although, for some inexplicable cause, you are anxious to suppress those feelings. Oh ! do not at this moment, when I am harassed both in mind and body, deny to me the blessing of your sympathy.”

“ Why will you persist in urging me to feign what I cannot feel ? ” asked his wife, struggling to regain her self-possession ; “ how can I sympathise in a triumph with which I am totally unconnected ? It is for Lady Malcolm and her daughter, in whose cause you exerted the talents which, when

their exhibition could only have profited your wife and child, you suffered to lie dormant, to congratulate you on their success."

"Ida!" exclaimed her husband, reproachfully, "you are unjust. You well know how long I had been yearning for an opportunity of usefulness, and that until the day when I was entrusted with this cause, which will, as I trust, prove the corner-stone of my professional reputation, I had been unable to secure one. Surely you would not visit it upon me as a crime that my first efforts were exerted in the behalf of my mother's dearest friend?"

"By no means; and in the acknowledgments of that friend you will have your best reward. It is the consciousness of that fact which closes my own lips."

"But can you imagine for a moment that anything can compensate to me for your own cold indifference?"

"Do not deceive yourself, Sydney," was the measured reply; "for you cannot deceive me. Had this famous trial, which has so suddenly lifted you from obscurity to fame, involved the interests of any other individual than Edith Malcolm, I consider it very problematical if you would have exhibited the same amount of energy."

"Again, Ida?"

"Can you deny the fact?"

"Yes, and no. In any and every case I should have felt it my duty to put forth all my strength; but I do not seek to deny that I should have felt much less anxiety as to the result."

"For once you are frank!"

"For once! Have you ever found me otherwise? Listen to me, Ida: high-minded, pure-hearted, and capable, as I well know, of any sacrifice for those you love, you are, nevertheless, destroying our mutual

happiness by a phantom which you have yourself evoked. Once more, despite your pledge to the contrary, you are indulging in inferences as unjust to myself as they are injurious to the innocent girl, for whom I have never felt more than the regard and affection of a brother. Can you not rely upon my plighted word? And have you forgotten that she was the promised bride of your poor cousin?"

"A fable," said Mrs. Elphinstone, scornfully; "a bridegroom with the hand of death already pressing upon his heart!—a bride who scarcely vouchsafed to shed a tear over his untimely grave! The game was ill-played, and could not deceive the lookers-on."

"Can it be possible, Ida, that you still persist in so fatal a delusion? Have you no respect for the father of your child?—no regard for the honour of your own sex? If

it, indeed, be so ; if you blindly indulge in a weakness which neither assurances nor proofs can overcome, what a life of misery is before us both ! ”

“ The assurances have not been wanting,” said his wife, gloomily ; “ but where are the proofs ? ”

“ They exist in the fact that, aware of your suspicions, I have not for months frequented the house of Lady Malcolm, save on professional business ; and that I voluntarily offered to effect a total estrangement between the two families.”

“ By exposing me and my wretchedness to the contempt of those who had caused it.”

“ Ida, do not drive me to extremity ! ” exclaimed her husband ; “ from you I can bear, I have borne, much—but all endurance has its limits. I cannot long support an existence so cruel as this to which you have condemned me. While I believed that your jealousy

was the result of an affection which would not brook less than an adequate return, I strove by every means in my power to prove how much you wronged me; but now, when I see and feel that I am no longer the object of either love or confidence, I have not self-command enough to endure the daily and hourly trials to which I am subjected."

"And do I escape my share of suffering?"

"Unfortunately you do not. Would that it were otherwise!"

"We have committed a fatal error, Sydney," said Mrs. Elphinstone suddenly; "or rather it is I who have been guilty of one. In my wretched egotism, believing that I could and should suffice to make your happiness, I urged you to abandon the world, that we might live only for each other. I overtaxed your affection; I calculated too blindly on your stability; putting firm faith in the assurances which you had given me

that when once I became your wife your existence would be bound up in mine, I thought myself secure. What the result of my confidence has been, I need not say: suffice it that we are both most wretched! You affirm that you can no longer support such an existence; judge, then, how little I shall be able to endure it. I never deceived you, Sydney; I warned you, when you sought my hand, that if ever I had *proof* of your falsehood, I should hate as deeply as I had ever loved. I say so still; but, until I have that proof, I will struggle on for my child's sake—aye, even for my own—for what have I now left on earth to cling to but yourself."

Exhausted by her own emotion, Ida sank back upon her chair, and buried her face in her hands, while hot tears forced their way through her trembling fingers. In an instant, Elphinstone was at her side.

“And I—I,” he murmured convulsively; “I have none but you. Why will you close your heart against me?”

With a wild gesture, his wife flung her arms about his neck.

“Precisely as I anticipated!” said a voice, which proceeded from the unclosed door that opened upon the lawn, and Lady Malcolm, with a beaming smile and extended hand, advanced eagerly towards them.

In an instant, Mrs. Elphinstone stood erect; no trace of tears could be detected in her flashing eyes, although they still lingered on her cheeks: proudly, and even defyingly, she returned the animated glance which was fastened on her; and while Sydney grasped, with warmth and fervour, the proffered hand, his wife remained cold and motionless.

“Did I not tell you that one word would suffice to explain all?” asked their visitor cheerfully; “and now that word has been



spoken, you see the happy effect which it has produced."

"Will you do me the favour to interpret your meaning, Lady Malcolm?" asked Ida, haughtily; "for you must pardon me if I confess myself unable to comprehend either the purport of your words, or the reason of this somewhat extraordinary intrusion on the privacy of my home."

"Will you not excuse its want of ceremony in the earnestness of its motive, my dear Mrs. Elphinstone? With considerable difficulty I succeeded in convincing your husband that your late unhappiness had arisen solely from your uneasiness on the subject of a certain Lady Mary Maitland, and that, consequently, when he informed you that she was about to become Marchioness of Brentwood, you would at once appreciate at its real value the idle gossip of a few tattling women."

Mrs. Elphinstone glanced towards her husband for an instant, and a sarcastic expression passed over her features as she replied, "You are very kind, Madam, to interest yourself so warmly in our domestic happiness, but, unfortunately, I am too clear-sighted to become your dupe. Until this moment I never heard even the name of the lady to whom it would appear that Mr. Elphinstone was so much devoted, as to render it a matter of congratulation to me that she is about to become a wife. *This* was a piece of intelligence which I had yet to learn, and I thank you for the information, tardy as it is."

"Mrs. Elphinstone, what would your manner to me imply? You know how sincere an affection I feel, and have ever felt, for your husband, but even his wife may presume too far upon it."

"Oh, I can incur the threatened risk

without shrinking;" said Ida with a mocking laugh. "It is really time that we should understand each other; and I can but admire the frankness with which Lady Malcolm acknowledged an affection in which her daughter so cordially unites."

"Ida!" exclaimed her husband imploringly.

"Suffer Mrs. Elphinstone to explain herself, Sydney," said their visitor, with calm dignity; "if I mistake not, there was an allusion made to Edith—to Miss Malcolm, which requires explanation, and I demand it here and now."

"You shall have it, Madam;" said the infatuated woman, as she drew herself proudly up and confronted the pale and stately matron. "If I was not aware, until you obliged me by the information, that at the very time when Mr. Elphinstone (no doubt supposing that I must ultimately

become the heiress of the wealthy Mr. Trevanion), induced me to believe that I was the only woman he had ever loved, he had so far committed himself in another quarter, as to have become the theme of idle tongues, and subjected a lady to the same mortification, I feel little disposed at the present day to resent the indignity which he then offered to me.

“I do not even seek or care to know whether on that occasion he played the flattering part of a rejected suitor ; or, weighing the lady’s reputed wealth with my own, conceived that the scale turned in my favour ; if the former was the case, his own feelings must have been a sufficient punishment ; if the latter, I am now taught to exult in a firmness on the part of my father, which I had hitherto regarded as cruelty.

“Thus, then, I trust you will perceive that, although the knowledge of Mr. Elphinstone’s

former attachment by no means tends to exalt my opinion of either his stability or his good faith, it cannot otherwise affect my happiness. I am no child to fight with shadows. And now, as you request it, I will explain my reference to Miss Malcolm. I confess, that to myself it appears wholly unnecessary that I should do so, but since you request it —”

“I do not request, I demand it.”

“Ida!” once more exclaimed her husband in violent agitation.


Mrs. Elphinstone disregarded an appeal, of which she even appeared to be unconscious; and coldly pursued:

“You found us happy, Lady Malcolm. When you first crossed our path we were, or I believed that we were, everything to each other; not a cloud had come between us; and what has been the result of our acquaintance?”

With a groan wrung from his very heart, Sydney flung himself on the sofa, and buried his face among the cushions. He could not bear to meet the eyes of the admirable woman and unfailing friend, who was about for his sake to be subjected to the most cruel insults that could be offered to a mother.

“The result!” echoed Lady Malcolm, in a tone of undisguised amazement.

“The result, Madam: You have a daughter younger than myself, perhaps handsomer—I am too proud, or perhaps under existing circumstances, too careless, to contest that point. I welcomed her to my home, where she has gradually supplanted me. She has been my husband’s chosen companion; she consoled him by her society when, by giving birth to his child, I was condemned to the irksomeness of a sick-room; her accomplishments have administered to his amusements; her attentions have soothed his vanity; and



finally, when the welfare of those who were dependent on him failed to arouse him into energy and action, she discovered the secret of awakening both, by enlisting them in her service. And you demand to know my meaning, Lady Malcolm ! You, who have looked calmly on, and suffered the affections of my husband to be wrenched from me, day by day, by the wiles of an artful girl."

"No more, Ida—no more!" exclaimed her husband, suddenly springing up ; " You cannot understand the bearing of your words ; you cannot mean to imply to the mother of Edith —— "

"I imply nothing, Mr. Elphinstone, and I am fully and painfully aware of my own meaning. I have endured much, and long ; but all human endurance has its limits."

Lady Malcolm had turned away, but the violence of her emotion could be detected in the convulsive shiver by which her whole

frame was agitated. Twice she strove to speak, but the words died away upon her lips ; and her heart throbbed visibly beneath the pressure of the hand with which she strove in vain to control its beatings.

"Sydney," she said, at length, in a hoarse whisper, "I forgive your wife for your mother's sake—I can do no more. My pure, innocent child! My poor Edith! Who shall escape the tongue of slander, the taint of suspicion, since she has become their victim. Farewell, Sydney, we must meet no more on this earth. Would that our final parting had been less bitter."

"Not so, Lady Malcolm, not so ;" said Elphinstone, sternly, as he retained his grasp of the hand which she had extended to him. "My wife has truly said, that 'all human endurance has its limits,' and I have been forced beyond the boundary of mine. I will *not* consent that this meeting shall be our final



one ; I will *not* consent to be abandoned by my best and oldest friend at the bidding of a woman, who, in the indulgence of a weak and vicious passion, has forfeited at once her own dignity and the respect of her husband. I thank you that you have not attempted to vindicate your pure and injured daughter, and, by so doing, cast a doubt on my own honour. Mrs. Elphinstone is, happily for us both, possessed of an income which will enable her to quit a home in which she declares herself to have been deceived, neglected, and dishonoured ; nor shall I ever cease to remember that she is the mother of my child, should I have it in my power to add to her worldly comfort and respectability.

“In becoming my wife she made great and undeniable sacrifices, which I have endeavoured to repay by a forbearance that has at last rendered me contemptible in my own eyes. I have deserved the indignities which

have been heaped upon me; but I will now assert myself.

"Violating, as Mrs. Elphinstone has done, every principle of delicacy, she shall not have cause to reproach me with a want of generosity in my turn. I am a father; and how I have loved our boy she well knows; but I will spare her the pang which I inflict upon myself; I will not rob her of her child. She will, at least, have one being left to love, while I—I ——"

"Sydney!" gasped his wife, as she approached him. "Do I understand you rightly? Do you sacrifice me and your child to those who have brought this misery upon me?"

"I ask you to make no sacrifice," was the cold reply; "I leave you free, while securing my own immunity from further insult."

"Sydney," said Lady Malcolm, in her turn; "beware of forming a rash and hasty resolution. That you have been wronged is

true, but you love your wife, and must not without mature reflection destroy the happiness of two lives."

"Doubtlessly, Madam," remarked Ida, bitterly, "what Mr. Elphinstone refuses to an injured wife, he would concede to your entreaties. I, however, decline to owe anything to the intercession of the individual ——"

"Ida," interposed her husband; "let it suffice that you have hitherto been enabled to insult me with impunity; I will not suffer you to carry your madness further. If the dignity and honour of your husband are of so little importance in your eyes that you can afford to sacrifice them to your insane and unfounded suspicions, I warn you that I shall not attempt to reciprocate the injury, but will part from you without noise or scandal; venture, however, to utter but one word affecting the reputation of those to whom

you are indebted for a friendship which you have requited with the most gratuitous ingratitude, and I shall prove less forbearing. The law shall then separate us, and the world shall judge between us."

"Yet once more let me entreat—" commenced Lady Malcolm, earnestly.

"It is useless, Madam," said Ida, with a calm more frightful than the wildest passion; "the question has been decided. I prefer the beggary to which Mr. Elphinstone has condemned me, to any association with those whom I can neither regard nor respect, and whose very presence is irksome to me. Permit me, however, before you leave us, to assure you that I am not the victim you would fain have made me. I warned my husband before I gave him my hand, that mine was not a heart which could be trampled on with impunity. I warned him that mine was no cold and common nature, which could

be stung, and requite the venom with a smile. Believe me when I say—for I say it advisedly—that I can hate as deeply as I have loved; that where I have been injured I can requite. Do not picture me to yourself, or paint me to your daughter, as crushed by the fate to which you have mutually hurried me. The blow will fall more heavily upon my husband than upon myself. He abandons me to the comments of the world—I leave him to the reproaches of his own conscience.”

Lady Malcolm offered no reply, but, after wringing the hand of Sydney, walked slowly from the room, and the husband and wife were alone together.

## CHAPTER XV.

## A FIRST SEPARATION.

ON the departure of Lady Malcolm, Mrs. Elphinstone had, in her turn, advanced to the door of the apartment, firmly and haughtily, but with a slow and measured step, which would, had he been inclined to do so, have afforded ample time to her husband to detain her.

Mr. Elphinstone, however, evinced no desire to control her movements. He was following Lady Malcolm with his eyes as she

traversed the garden; nor did he move from the window, until she had disappeared through the door of communication which opened upon her own grounds; and when he at length changed his position, his wife had left the room.

For a moment the young husband looked around him, like one bewildered by a sudden blow. Even the accustomed objects by which he was surrounded appeared strange and unfamiliar. There was an expression of keen suffering upon his features, and a tremulousness in his manner, which betrayed how deeply he had been moved; but his eye was tearless as he raised his hat from the table, and, ringing for a servant, desired that Mrs. Elphinstone might be informed he should not return home that night, and that, consequently, it would be unnecessary to detain the dinner.

Poor Sydney! The illusions of life were

over for him ; and he felt that henceforward he must pursue his path alone. For hours he wandered through the lanes where he had so often loitered with Ida ; nor was it until the declining sun warned him that he had still to seek a home, that he reluctantly turned once more into the busy thoroughfare which led towards town.

His reflections had been very bitter ones, but his conscience acquitted him of wrong ; and while he remembered, with the sad yearning of regret, all that his wife had once been to him—his elegant, though modest home—his beautiful and only child—his very heart seemed bursting within him. But his resolution was not shaken even for an instant. His wounded affections might, and did, rebel ; but the pride of outraged manhood gave him strength to resist their pleadings.

Still it was with a melancholy feeling of



isolation that he at length reached the Temple, which he had resolved should be his future home, and gave the necessary instructions to his amazed but unquestioning clerk.

"My profession must henceforth be wife, and child, and world to me," he murmured to himself, as he sank into one of the unwieldy chairs by which his private office was encumbered. "I must forget the past, and strive to suffice to myself. I will endeavour to evoke ambition from the ashes of outraged affection. I cannot be happy, but I may yet be true to myself."

It was a bold vaunt; but, even as he uttered it, he felt its emptiness, and, after a sharp struggle with feelings which he vainly stigmatised as weak and womanly, he bent his head upon the desk before him, and wept bitterly.

He was alone; and no prying eye could note his tears. For a while this conviction

gave him a sense of relief, which was almost happiness; but soon the consciousness returned to him that thus he must ever be; that, alike in grief or toil, he must remain companionless—uncheered by the sympathy of home; that, husband and father though he was, the tenderness of a wife, the love of a child, would no longer make his labour light, or his success a triumph.

And he was still so young! So full of the best and holiest impulses of life! To what long and weary years of existence might he not be condemned? The reflections startled him. No! the life of study and intellectual struggle upon which he had decided so prematurely, would not suffice to blot out the bitter memories of the past. He could not breathe the same air, or exist in the same hemisphere, with the woman he had so dearly loved—the child upon whom he had built up so many hopes.

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"I will labour on until I have ensured their comfort and well-being," was his next resolve. "I will restore to her, by my exertions, the affluence which, for my sake, she abandoned; my boy shall cease to be a beggar; and then, when I have secured my name from reproach, the world will be before me, and I will hew out my own path unflinchingly."

The darkness grew dense about him; every object in the vast and dreary room became dim and indistinct; and the deep silence of the ancient pile was rendered still more oppressive by the hollow reverberations from the busy streets beyond.

The tide of feeling rushed back upon him. The past, with all its hopes and all its affections, rose on his memory with mocking brilliancy; and with lingering tenderness he lived over again the few brief months of happiness and love that he had passed with Ida.

“Is it firmness or cowardice which has impelled me to the extreme step that I have now taken?” he asked himself. “Is it not my duty to endure all, until I have secured the competence which is now mine only in perspective, and which may even fail me yet? Dare I abandon the woman who, in the unselfish confidence of a trusting heart, gave herself to me in my poverty and obscurity, when she might have become the wife of one who could have surrounded her with all the luxuries of life?”

“In seeking to assert myself, I have been alike ungenerous and unjust; but it is not yet too late to repair my fault. She cannot mistake my motive, if I tell her frankly the decision at which I have arrived. To-morrow, then—to-morrow I will once more return to that home which I believed that I had abandoned for ever. I will strive to remember all that she once was to me, and

forget that which she now is. I will support my wrongs in silence, until I can liberate both her and myself with honour.

“It is bitter, very bitter ; but it must be borne. She does not comprehend how I have loved, how I still love her, and it is better so ; she will have one regret the less when the hour of separation at length comes. Yes, I feel that I have decided rightly. She is too young, too beautiful, to be abandoned to a hollow and cold-hearted world until she possesses the means of compelling its respect. I have—I ought to have no alternative—and I will meet my fate courageously, cruel as it is.”

As the unhappy young man arrived at this determination, he rang for lights, which were no sooner placed before him, than with nervous rapidity he unsealed and read the letters which lay upon his table ; and for a brief moment a smile of exultation played

about his lips. There was work before him ; not assistance coldly and grudgingly tendered, but opportunities of usefulness pressed cordially and flatteringly upon him. His heart might be silenced for ever, but his intellect was about to be called into full exercise ; and henceforth he must live for fame, and forget his private sorrows in his public duties.

In the excitement of the moment he seized his pen, and far into the night, alone, fasting, and heart-crushed, he laboured on.

His solitude was uninvaded, his wants unheeded. He was alone with his vanished visions, his blighted hopes, his withered trust ; nor was it until the cold grey dawn stole with its dreary gleam into the room, that he at length flung himself upon a sofa, and fell into a deep and comfortless sleep.

And how had Ida—she who had wilfully wrecked her own happiness and that of a

husband who she loved with all the passionate ardour of her ill-governed nature—how had she passed the night in which she had become worse than widowed? At times on her knees beside the cradle of her child, weeping such tears as leave their trace for ever upon the heart from which they flow—upbraiding herself, her destiny—regretting the past—shrinking from the future—and listening with a beating heart for the returning step of him whom she had outraged. At times pacing the room with rapid and unequal steps, braving the fate which her own folly had brought upon her, and striving to believe that she no longer loved him.

As the night wore on, and the clock of a neighbouring church pealed out the hour of midnight, however, all the false energy by which she had hitherto been sustained, forsook her. Never, until the moment in which she at length despaired of his return, had

she been fully conscious how necessary Sydney was to her existence. Even her child was forgotten in the utter despair which took possession of her. The very firmness with which he had brought this wretchedness upon her compelled her respect; and for awhile she cowered beneath the conviction of his unsuspected strength of character. This prostration of spirit was, however, only temporary.

“Be it so,” she murmured to herself; “the contest will no longer be an unequal one; in bruising my heart, he will crush his own; for even while he betrayed me, I feel that he loved me still. I have no longer a home—scarcely a name—and yet I will defy the fate to which he has condemned me. Time will prove who can best bear up against the the trial.

“But no, no; that seeming strength could have been but momentary. Sydney, you have



deceived yourself; it is not I who am destined to be the victim: you cannot, you dare not, abandon both wife and child, and brave the world without sympathy or support. No, I feel and know that you will yet return to my feet a suppliant; but it shall be too late, even did you sue to me this very hour. You abandon me to poverty; I accept it, for you will have condemned yourself to an existence far more wretched; and while the world may sympathise in my privations, you shall never know the keener pangs that you have inflicted on my heart.

“Aye,” she pursued still more bitterly; “the moment in which you have thrust me forth to struggle with that world has been well chosen. Your path is smooth before you; you have felt the intoxicating consciousness of success—the future is bright in its promise; and it is now—now—that you assume the semblance of a power which I defy.

“Were I still the spoiled and pampered heiress, I could forgive you; for then indeed I could, without humiliation, welcome you back to my heart, and struggle to forget the past;—I shall be very wretched, but I, too, can be firm; there have been martyrs who have smiled at the stake; and I, like them, will endure my martyrdom without complaint, proudly conscious that I shall not suffer alone.”

Day broke; the busy hum of men rose on the air; the sorrowing, who had for a few brief hours forgotten their cares in sleep, awoke to renewed grief; the happy sprang from their beds, exulting in a new season of enjoyment; and ere the sun had long been above the horizon, Sydney Elphinstone, true to his purpose of the previous night, was already on his way, self-accusing and self-rebuked, to his now cheerless home.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## HOME.

"At last!" murmured Ida to herself, as from the window of her dressing-room, which she had flung open in order to cool her aching brow in the fresh morning air, she saw her husband pass the gate of the lawn, and approach the house: "I knew that it must be so; a few short hours have sufficed to show him that he over-rated his own strength; this is as I would have it;—I shall not be the forsaken wife, thrust forth

from the hearth and heart of the man on whose truth and loyalty she had relied ; but the indignant and self-avenging woman, who has energy enough to revenge her own wrongs !”

As she thus communed with her own thoughts, she hastily bound up her hair, bathed her swollen eyes with cold water, and arranged her dress, which, in the irritation of a long and sleepless night, had become disordered.

As the Indian suttee decorates herself with the most costly jewels ere she prepares to ascend the funeral-pyre of her husband, so did Mrs. Elphinstone, strong in her resolution to resist the pleadings of Sydney, and to inflict on him a pang which must, nevertheless, as she was painfully conscious, recoil upon herself, stand calmly before her glass, and endeavour with fastidious care to obliterate every vestige of the suffering through

which she had just passed, ere she doomed herself to life-long misery by rejecting all overtures to a reconciliation which might yet have saved them both.

Slowly, and with an unruffled brow, she ultimately descended to the breakfast-room; and there, as she had anticipated, she found her husband—not calm and collected like herself—but evidently labouring under an agitation by which he was thoroughly unnerved.

As she entered the apartment, he turned abruptly towards her, and extended his hand; but the action was unheeded by his wife, who, uttering a cold and brief “good morning,” prepared to lay her own hand upon the bell.

“Hear me, Ida,” he said eagerly, as he intercepted the movement; “before our solitude is invaded by the entrance of a servant, let me tell you that I have re-

cognised my fault ; wounded pride and the resentment of a heart smitten in its best affections hurried me into a harshness foreign to my nature, and unworthy of one whom, however lightly you may now regard his happiness, you once loved.

“ Let us forget the past, at least until I can provide you with a home more congenial to your tastes and habits. We can never again be to each other what we once were ; but we may still live under the shelter of the same roof, and, by mutual forbearance, replace our lost illusions by a calm and peaceful reality.

“ Our position must be a painful and an onerous one, as I well know ; but if we both strive to render it endurable, surely we may succeed.”

“ Mr. Elphinstone,” was the cold reply, “ the picture which you have sketched is by no means an attractive one. That you have, since you left your home, recognised the

cowardice and selfishness of sacrificing your wife to the woman who has supplanted her in your affections, I am rejoiced to hear, as it proves that you are not as yet thoroughly forgetful of your responsibilities as a husband and a father; and for your own sake, I am glad of this, although the fact cannot for a moment affect either my happiness or my determination.

“You are right, I did love you once—truly, deeply, fervently—but that time is past. Ida Trevanion confided in you—honoured you—would have laid down her life to brighten yours—and clung to you through every change of fortune. Ida Elphinstone honours you no longer—confides in you no longer: her idol has been cast from its pedestal, and she has found it clay.

“Do not mistake yourself; it is no sublime and self-abnegating repentance which now leads you to confess and to deplore your in-

justice ; it is simply a sense of the void which our separation will cause in your future existence. You still love me, in spite of yourself—in spite of the wrong that you have done me,—the indignity to which you have exposed me—and you cannot contemplate without terror the consequences of a final rupture between us. I am still, as ever, necessary to your happiness ; and it is for your own sake, not for mine, that you are anxious to avert the evil.”

“ Ida, I swear to you, that were I at this moment possessed of the affluence to which I trust one day to attain—were I enabled to place you in the position from which I rashly hurled you down—believing, vain fool that I was ! that my love would compensate to you for every sacrifice—I should not now be here, pleading to you to relieve me from self-rebuke.

“ Even now, I do not ask of you to pardon



anything beyond the impetuous and unconsidered resolution which I yesterday expressed, for, save in that solitary instance, I have nothing to regret—nothing with which to reproach myself. All I entreat—and believe me when I say that I do it earnestly—is, that you will remain beneath my roof, and under my protection, until I am enabled to feel that my ill-omened love has not entailed upon you the misery and suffering of poverty.

“Like yourself, I was weak while I believed that I possessed your affection, but, like yourself, I have acquired strength by trial. I *can* bear to live without you; I *can* dare to look forward to an existence unsolaced by affection; but I cannot brook that the woman I have loved should be exposed to trials, to which she could never have been subjected had she not become my wife.”

"You talk bravely," said Ida, with a withering sneer; "the future will prove in how far you are justified in using such high-sounding words. Once more, I tell you that I am revenged; I will *not* remain another day beneath your roof.

"I express no gratitude for your assumed anxiety in my future welfare; for, specious as the argument might seem to one unacquainted with your nature, it can never mislead me. In your egotism, you dread the comments of the world; the contempt which must attach to a man who, after winning the heart of a trusting woman who had hitherto known nothing of life save its enjoyments, thrust her forth to poverty when she was bold enough to resent her wrongs.

"Well, sir, to these unsparing comments, to that withering contempt, you shall be subjected. I am no hireling to await in humble submission the good pleasure of a master. I

will owe you nothing—I will not even accept as a boon from your hand, the guardianship of my child, for you durst not wrest him from me. Unlike yourself, I *have* a regret—I *have* a reproach. I regret that the fortune of the heiress did not enable you to secure the affluence which, in all probability, invested me, in your eyes, with charms that faded under the disappointment which supervened ; and I reproach, not you, but myself, that I was weak enough to be deluded into supposing that such must not inevitably have been the case.”


“ Ida,” said Elphinstone, sadly, “ passion has made you illogical. If it indeed be as you affirm, and that I am in truth guilty of the ungenerous weakness of which I am now accused ; if your loss of fortune, forfeited as it was for my sake, has rendered you less dear to me ; then why should I shrink from the destiny which you have hewn out for

me? How can I love you still with a fervour which you have declared me unable to control or to subdue? By prophesying my life-long misery in resigning you, you still confess your faith in the stability of my affection, and tacitly admit the falsehood of your own accusations; by fastening upon me the vice of avarice, you divest me of those finer feelings which could alone render my future isolated existence a burthen and a pang. The comments of a world, to which, for your sake, I shall offer no explanation, I shall know how to despise; its contempt I shall regard as little, until I have compelled its respect. Do not, therefore, delude yourself; but pause ere you suffer passion to overwhelm your reason. Once more, and for the last time, I entreat of you to have mercy upon us both."

"And once more, and for the last time, I refuse to comply with your entreaty," vehe-

mently replied his wife; "my boy will suffice to me; and I trust that, for your own sake, you may be enabled to derive equal consolation in the smiles of your mother's friend and her inestimable daughter, or in those of the Lady Mary Maitland, who had the honour of preceding me in your affections, until, like a wayward child, you weary of the new toy as you wearied of the old one.

"The world is wide, Mr. Elphinstone, and you are becoming its favourite; I should be unwilling to cast one shadow upon the brightness of your path. You have assured me that the fame which you have lately acquired must bring fortune in its train; enjoy that fortune without scruple and without stint, for, from the hour in which I quit your house, I make no claim upon you; I reject all favours, all concessions; I came to you almost penniless, and almost penniless I am



content to continue. Console yourself as I shall—if you can.”

“And this is your final resolution?”

“It is.”

“So be it, then,” was the rejoinder of the young husband; “I had hoped that the memory of the past—the fate of our only child—might have weighed with you; but I have deceived myself, and will urge you no further. Only remember, Ida, that a few hours hence, should you repent your decision, it will already be too late. Since you refuse to accord to me even the right of contributing to your necessities, I shall feel little inclination to waste my life in profitless labour, nor shall the name of the man, towards whom you have evinced a hatred so unbounded and uncompromising, ever again be intruded upon you. You have nothing more to fear either from my affection or my enmity. As you have justly remarked, the world is wide; I

will make my home beyond the reach of inquiry or pursuit. I am young and strong ; strong in purpose as in frame. Wretched I may be, but I shall at least be a stranger to remorse. I have endeavoured to fulfil my duty to the last ; and, if I have failed, I am content to abide the consequences of my error."

For an instant the firmness of Mrs. Elphinstone forsook her ; there was a depth of feeling in the accents of her husband that fell cold and heavy on her heart ; but she would not yield ; and she was about to utter some chilling rejoinder, when a servant entered, and placed a couple of letters on the table.

Without even glancing at the superscription, and anxious to impress upon her husband that at the very moment in which he was threatening to expatriate himself—thus rendering all possibility of their future

reconciliation impossible—she was indifferent to a resolution beneath which she nevertheless quailed, she tore open that which lay nearest to her ; and she was unable to suppress a start of surprise as she recognised, in the lengthy and highly-perfumed epistle, the handwriting of Lady Mary Brooklands. A blended feeling of astonishment and contempt impelled her to read it to the end.

Experience had taught her the hollowness of her former friend ; and as this was the first communication which she had received from her since her marriage, a vague suspicion crossed her mind that her astute ladyship must have been impelled by some powerful motive to lavish upon her the laudatory endearments which formed the staple of the missive.

Suddenly, however, affecting to remember the presence of her husband, she held towards him the still open letter, saying as she did so:



"A letter from your amiable aunt, Mr. Elphinstone. It may, perhaps, interest you to cast your eye over it."

Sydney received it with a silent bow, but it was merely to fold and replace it on the table; and he was just about to quit the room, when a wild cry from his wife arrested him. Ida sat motionless, with her eyes fixed on vacancy, and a bulky packet with a deep black border, of which she had just broken the seal, crushed convulsively in her hands.

"Read it, Sydney, if you would save my senses," she at length gasped out in a shrill whisper; "read it, for I cannot."

Elphinstone took the packet from her hands, and instantly detected the familiar characters of Mr. Trevanion. He, however, evinced no emotion; be the contents of the letter what they might, he imagined that they could in no way interest himself; but he erred in his judgment.

Thus, while Ida, panting from agitation, listened with parted lips and starting eyes, he stood calm and unmoved; and his voice was clear and steady, as its wont, as he prepared to obey her.

Thus ran the letter.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## THE LETTER.

“TREVANION HALL,

“*August*, 184—.

“WHEN the daughter to whom I had intrusted alike my future happiness, and the realisation of my most cherished hopes, left the shelter of my roof to throw herself into the arms of an obscure and needy lover, I believed that I had for ever closed my heart against her.

“She well knew that through her, and by her, I would alone attain the object to which

I had devoted the whole energies of a laborious life; that I had neither support nor sympathy to anticipate from the woman whom I had made my wife; that my path towards the goal to which I aspired was beset by mortification; that my position was a false one; and that the present was only rendered endurable to me, by the probable results of the future.

“That daughter was my only child; and the disappointment inflicted upon me at her birth, ought perhaps to have prepared me for the still keener mortification to which I was subjected by her marriage. It did not, however, even in the moment of painful excitement, when her sex was revealed to me. I at once felt that the infant, at least, was blameless—that it was an accident of fate; and I was no sooner satisfied that I had little prospect of again becoming a father, than I resolved to do for the girl, who was destined

to be my heiress, all that I would have done for the son who would have perpetuated my name.

“You best know, Mrs. Sydney Elphinstone, how I redeemed the pledge made to myself within a few years of your birth. You best know how care and gold were alike lavished on your infancy, your girlhood, and your maturity; but what you did not perhaps comprehend was this: that in administering with ready hand to your vanity, your luxury, and your egotism, in developing your talents, and in affording to you every opportunity of enhancing those personal qualities with which you had been gifted by nature—as if to convince me that the darling project of my life might yet be accomplished—I was actuated, less by a weak feeling of pride in your personal and mental endowments, than by a desire to accomplish my purpose.

“Had I left you to the sole guardianship

of a fond and mindless mother, you would have grown to womanhood as obscure as herself, and as unworthy to co-operate in my own views; and thus, you would have had no right to aspire to a fate less mean than that to which you saw fit to condemn yourself.

“And now, for the last time—as henceforth the subject must never again be mooted between us—let me impress upon you—that you have deserved no forgiveness at my hands. I trusted in you, and you betrayed my trust. I had confided to you the irksomeness of my position—the humiliation which I had endured from my nearest relatives; I had poured out my heart before you, and made you feel how essential your obedience to my wishes must inevitably prove to my ultimate resumption of the social rank to which I was entitled by my birth; and you failed me.

“ You fled from my house like a detected felon, and you have paid the penalty of your fault. With ostentatious pride, you left behind you every article of luxury to which the world could have affixed a price ; but you strangely overlooked the fact that you carried away with you a father’s hopes and a mother’s peace of mind. Were you less culpable than if you had broken into my strong box, or rifled your mother’s jewel-case of its last diamond ? I leave it to yourself to answer.

“ You had wealth within your grasp ; a coronet at your feet ; cupidity and ambition might alike have been satisfied, and you rejected both—for what ? To unite yourself to one who deprived you of every worldly advantage—to see your first-born son come into life a beggar—and to welcome the alms of an offended father as a boon from Heaven ; while even for those, trifling as the gift

would have appeared in the days when you had not a wish ungratified, you were indebted—not to any voluntary relenting on my part (for my experience has taught me that no human being exists upon the earth who might not be independent of the sordid wants of the world, did he not invite them either by imprudence or dishonour)—but to the intercession of your friend, Lady Malcolm.

“I am far from justifying the interference of a stranger in such delicate matters as those of family differences ; and it is even probable that I might have resented her Ladyship’s intrusion on the occasion to which I have alluded, had I not been aware that she was one of the most valued friends of Sir Jasper Trevanion, to whom I felt convinced that she would represent your necessities, should I fail to relieve them—a humiliation to which I would not have exposed myself for half my fortune. To her, therefore, and not to myself,



you owe the temporary assistance, which I trust proved serviceable to you in your need.

“ And now, as I presume that I have enabled you fully to comprehend the nature of our relative positions, I will proceed to explain my reasons for terminating the silence which has so long existed between us.

“ You are a wife and a mother ; in the first of these capacities I am not only willing, but even anxious, to ignore your pre-existence as much as possible ; nor, from all that has reached me, am I inclined to suppose that you are less desirous than myself, to render the chain as light as may be practicable, without exposing yourself to the idle gossiping of a censorious world.

“ As a mother, however, the case should be, and *must* be, widely different. Circumstances have occurred, which tend to make the son of Mr. Sydney Elphinstone of considerable importance to the Trevanion family ;

and these I shall now communicate to you in detail, in order that you may decide upon your future line of action.

“About the period of your child’s birth, and while my uncle, Sir Jasper, was engaged in preparing the settlements, resetting the family diamonds, and completing the equipages which he had been to town to superintend, previous to the marriage of his son with Miss Edith Malcolm, your cousin Herbert Trevanion, whose health had long been visibly declining, became rapidly worse; and, with a want of moral courage which was, perhaps, fortunate for his successors—as he might (under the blind influence of a first passion, which you will in all probability not feel tempted, from your own experience, to doubt), have forced some imprudent concessions from his doating father—he never warned him of the fact of his approaching end, until it became too late for the Baronet

to divert any portion of the family possessions from their legitimate channel; and thus he ultimately died, without having effected the slightest alteration in the will which Sir Jasper had executed in favour of him and his heirs.

“Nor was this all; for the Baronet, utterly prostrated by the suddenness of the bereavement which had rendered his old age desolate—and, mark, Ida, that like you he had flung from him those who might have sustained and embellished his existence, had he done them justice—fell powerless beneath the blow; physically he resisted the shock, but his mind was less energetic than his frame; from the hour in which his son ceased to exist, he became a puling idiot.

“You will think this shocking, Ida, but this is, nevertheless, what men call retribution. In his pride and strength he drove me from his roof; in his imbecility and

weakness I made it safe and firm above him; in my youth he cast me forth; in his age I had secured to him the legitimate shelter of his home.

“ I am told that, legally, he was dead, and that I could in my turn have lorded it over his helplessness.—I need not say that I did not do so. My wrongs were sufficiently atoned, and I scorned the baseness of a vulgar vengeance.

“ Thus far, nothing had occurred with which I could not grapple single-handed, without one feeling of misgiving as regarded my own strength; but more was still to follow, which forced upon me the recollection that I was still a father; and that, although sinned against almost beyond forgiveness, I was bound to pardon the child who had offended, as well as the relative who had injured me.

“ Four days since, I received a hasty

summons to this place. The physical strength of Sir Jasper Trevanion had failed, but his intellect had been restored to him. I found him on his death-bed, but I already knew that he had long repented his injustice towards me, and I abstained from all reproach.

“As I stood beside his pillow, old memories indeed revived, but I thrust them back; and it was with a true heart and a calm brow that I pressed the hand which he extended to me. But for me, the old man would have been childless and desolate; like me, he had been for a time proud and relentless; now he clung to me as to the only being left to him on earth, to whom he could turn for comfort and support—who could save his death-bed from the intrusion of strangers and hirelings—who could close his eyes with the hand of affection, and follow him to the grave with the reverence of relationship—

and, as I saw and felt all this, Ida, my heart, long closed against all such emotion, yearned towards you.

“ As I forgave in that solemn hour the man who had marred my youth, so did I also forgive you, who had blighted my age.

“ He died that night; and until dawn I watched beside him, alone; for he had read to me the one great lesson of my life: and while I gazed in silence upon his rigid brow and compressed lips, never again to be unsealed in this world, and which had closed in the utterance of a blessing upon myself for the generosity with which I had requited his injustice, I felt that I could afford to forget all the past. It, therefore, remains for you to assist me in the effort.

“ I will not deceive you. The fact that you have a son, who must at my death succeed to the Trevanion estates, and bear the name of my ancestors, has not been with-

out its effect in strengthening my resolution. It were idle to deny that such is the case; but here, in the house of death, where the light of day is replaced by the glare of waxen tapers, and the voices of my fellow-men by the low whispers, which seem to be a foretaste of the hollow murmurs of the burial-vaults, where—after one gloomy pageant—all will relapse into silence, until it again opens to receive my own corpse, I am startled by the consciousness that I no longer suffice to myself.

“ I strive to conquer this weakness by dwelling upon the change that has come over my fortunes; by the reflection that I am now almost fabulously wealthy; by endeavouring to accustom my ear to the new titles by which I am addressed by those about me; and—shall I confess it?—I feel scorn of myself that I should be so unmanned by events perfectly natural in them-

selves, and which others will regard as utterly common-place, or as mere matter of congratulation.

“ Thus it is, however ; and you will, consequently, understand that you have once more become essential to my happiness.

“ Do not fail me a second time. These morbid feelings will pass away when I am once more involved in the cares and interests of life ; and you are well aware that to you alone I can turn with confidence to assist me in the new duties which have devolved upon me.

“ Your mother, Lady Trevanion, has no interests in common with myself, save such as affect her own comfort and convenience ; no intellect on which I can repose, no judgment to which I can appeal ; while, as regards Lady Mary Brooklands, you need only look back upon your own past career to feel that she is precisely the last person to whom



I would entrust the care of either my dignity or my honour.

“ Thus, Ida, a new career of triumph awaits you. Your former home, and the arms of your father, are open to you ; the future existence of your son is defined, and beyond the reach of fate. So soon as the tomb has closed over my aged relative, I shall return to town, where I shall anxiously await you, trusting that your future affection and obedience will obliterate the past.

“ You need fear no reproach, entertain no apprehension of my prolonged displeasure. Greatly as you have been to blame, your punishment has exceeded your fault. I am prepared alike to forgive and to forget.

“ I forward to you, by this post, a letter from your husband’s aunt, which, by some mistake was sent here with others addressed to myself. If it be as I conjecture, that her sapient ladyship foresaw the probability of

our reconciliation, and has written to reclaim her place in your affections—or, to speak more distinctly—to secure her own future interests, by affecting a sympathy in your trials which she has never felt, do not suffer yourself to be misled by her speciousness.

“She is in heart and soul an egotist; she sacrificed you to the necessities of her nephew, and now she would be equally ready to sacrifice you to her own.

“Once more, Ida, be just to yourself, and hasten to resume your proper station in society. By this day week I shall be again established in that home to which I am prepared to welcome you back, and where I trust to see the hopes which you once blighted in your own person either restored with increased brilliancy, or renewed and realised in that of your son.

“HUBERT TREVANION.”

## CHAPTER XVII.

## CONCLUSION.

"SYDNEY!" exclaimed Mrs. Elphinstone, springing from her seat, and casting herself on her knees, with clasped hands and streaming eyes; "Sydney, we are saved!"

"We are!"

"The past has been a hideous dream; the future is bright before us."

Elphinstone was silent.

"Why do you not speak, Sydney," pursued his wife; "why do you not exult with

me in the blessed prospect which has opened upon us?"

"I do indeed rejoice that my most ardent desire has been granted, Ida;" said her husband, in the calm accents of deep and concentrated feeling; "that both you and our boy are now secured against all possibility of struggle and privation. My heart is relieved of a weight by which it was crushed to the very earth, and I am thankful, most thankful."

"And yourself, Sydney? What of yourself?"

"Myself," replied the young man bitterly; "what should I say of myself, save that I exult in the reflection that Mr. Trevanion's daughter will no longer be sacrificed to my necessities."

"Mr. Trevanion's daughter!" echoed Ida hoarsely, as she rose to her feet, and looked earnestly into his face; "Mr. Trevanion's

daughter! Have I then ceased to be your wife?"

"Legally, no; but even that barrier to your future happiness may be removed, should you desire it."

"Sydney, do not torture me! Tell me what you mean."

"Simply that I have interpreted the true sense of your father's closing sentences. I am still too young to suppose that he can have speculated upon my death, when he expressed so ardent a hope that his dreams of ambition, as regarded yourself, might still be realised. Too young to die, as men commonly understand the term; but still old enough for that death of the soul—divorce."

A sharp scream burst from the lips of Ida.

"Why should you shrink from such a climax to our married life;" pursued Sydney, in the same unimpassioned tone; "Did you not wilfully deny my claim upon your affec-

tions? Did you not, unauthorised and uninfluenced by the sanction of a parent, spurn my protection as an insult, and my roof as a disgrace? Did you not avow that I no longer possessed either your love or your respect? Have you so soon forgotten the contempt with which you rejected my offers of aid—my earnest entreaties that you would allow me to fulfil those duties towards you which I had vowed at the altar? Have we not, from that moment, severed in heart and fact; and do you now quail before a mere form which would liberate you in the eyes of the world, and leave you free to make a nobler and a better choice?"

"Sydney!" gasped out his wife, vehemently clasping his arm, while her whole frame quivered with emotion; "Sydney, forgive me! Poor and helpless, I could have lived without you; or, if the effort had proved too mighty for my strength, I could

have died without a murmur, for life would have been valueless without your love; but now—now—on my knees, I implore of you to pity and to pardon me.”

“It is too late,” said Elphinstone, as he turned gloomily away; “one of those tears, one of those supplications, only an hour back, would have sufficed to restore pardon and peace between us; but the moment of reconciliation has now gone by for ever. Even as you spurned my entreaties, Ida, do I now reject yours. Let it suffice, that one of my family has debased herself by accepting the benefits grudgingly doled out to her by the insolence of wealth; do not hope to force a similar concession from myself.”

“Sydney, have you no mercy, no pity? I have deceived both you and myself. Never, never, did I love you more deeply, more devotedly, than when, in my mad folly, I accused and wronged you—yes, wronged

you; I will even believe that I did you wrong, if you will only once more take me to your heart, and call me by the blessed name of wife."

"You deceive yourself still, Ida; if in the obscurity of our present home you placed no faith in an affection which was subjected only to one solitary trial; if you could not see me evince a brotherly interest in a young and fatherless girl, who had been the playmate of my boyhood, and who had been reared under the eyes of an anxious and high-principled mother—how can you hope to induce me to place any faith in a pledge wrung from you in a moment of strong excitement?"

"Learn to know yourself better. The man who could not escape suspicion under such circumstances would be weak indeed to believe that he could be more secure, when the opportunities of misjudging him were multi-



plied a hundred-fold. I cannot take you to my heart, Ida, though I cannot pluck you thence ; though I do not hesitate to admit, should the admission still afford you one sensation of happiness or triumph, that you alone have ever, or can ever, possess it. I dare not call you wife, for you yourself have repudiated the title."

"For our child's sake ——"

"Ida, in my turn I ask, have you no mercy ? Am I not to be parted from my child ? Have I not completed my sacrifice, and, in return for all that I have done and suffered, I ask but this.

"Let the world condemn me if it will, let your own heart accuse me if it can, but do not let my boy misjudge me ; let me at least be blameless and honourable in his eyes. I claim, I demand, this justice ; and it is the last appeal I shall make to your generosity. We may never meet again ; in a few years I

shall have faded from his memory, and—Ida, for the love which you once bore me, will you not promise me that he shall never learn to loathe or despise his father? He will not even bear my name—I know it, but I do not murmur; it is my fate to resign every claim, every tie, which once bound me to an existence of delusive promise, and I submit in silence; yet, still I cannot forget that I have a child; that he is very dear to me, and that he is torn away from me for ever.”

“And your wife—your wife!” shrieked Ida.

Elphinstone turned towards her as she still knelt upon the floor, her hands tightly clenched together, her long and abundant hair, which had escaped the comb which should have confined it, half concealing her slight figure, and her livid features convulsed with agony; for a moment he stood gazing upon her as motionless as though he had been

hewn in stone ; then his breast heaved, a smothered sob escaped him, a few inarticulate words burst in a hollow murmur from his lips, and with frantic energy he bent down, raised her to his bosom, held her there for a few seconds, and, as he felt her weight grow heavy in his arms, he laid her softly upon a sofa, and rushed from his home.

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A month afterwards, Mrs. Elphinstone was the self-widowed inmate of her father's house ; Lady Mary Brooklands was in modest lodgings in a West-End street ; and no trace could be discovered of the young, heart-broken exile, who had abandoned his native land for ever.

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